UTILIZING A PASTORAL CARE MODEL TO EQUIP URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGREGANTS WITH COPING STRATEGIES FOR LOSS AND GRIEF

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ABSTRACT

UTILIZING A PASTORAL CARE MODEL TO EQUIP URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGREGANTS WITH COPING STRATEGIES FOR LOSS AND GRIEF

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The context for this model of ministry is the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio. The purpose of the grief support model that the writer created is to equip the African American congregation with grief coping strategies and empower them to move through the grieving process. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used with pre- and post-test analyses to evaluate the model's effectiveness. The findings measured the impact of the grief support model on congregants' knowledge of grief coping strategies. Supporting congregants through the grieving process will stimulate informed choices leading to effective coping strategies in the grieving process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with sincere appreciation that the writer acknowledges the participants in this project, who are members of the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, located in Columbus, Ohio, of which she is blessed to be an associate pastor. The writer also offers her sincere thanks for the support offered by associate Dr. Moxley, and peer associate Dr. Marcia Garrison. Expressions of gratitude go to her doctoral studies mentors, Dr. Jerome Stevenson, Dr. Emma Justes, and Dr. Gary Eubanks, for their guidance throughout this project.

The writer also thanks her sons, Tracy, Trent and Jeremy, her daughter Anitra and daughter in law Ebony and grandchildren for their support. She appreciates the words of encouragement from her supportive brothers and sisters especially Princess P. Castle and Jacqueline Delaney, brothers and her late brother Dr. Leon J. Petty who encouraged her to pursue the doctorate. This journey seemed tenacious and impossible coupled with the writer transforming from a student and facilitator of the project she envisioned, to becoming a participant. No longer was she just a mere researcher, but the writer became her own project when her own widowhood became her life. She knew she was the main subject and by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit she has been moving through the grieving process while completing this project.

DEDICATION

To my beloved and precious late husband, Rev. Paul A. Hale, who found the United Theological Seminary for me to pursue and complete this project. His encouragement throughout the endeavor speaks from beyond the grave.

To my late parents, Rev. Leon and Joanne Petty who always knew I could and would continue to carry the torch and do God's will.

ABBREVIATIONS

JTMBC	Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version

INTRODUCTION

This project is intended to help African American congregants at the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church weep through the mourning in the night so that they will have joy in the morning.[1] In this study, the writer explores the care and strategies for those among urban African American congregants who experience loss presently and historically. The writer focuses on the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church (JTMBC) and its community in Columbus, Ohio. The purpose of this research study is for those who have experienced a loss to become self-aware and manage their grief. The ultimate goal of the writer is to develop coping strategies that ministers or laypersons can use to help individuals move through the grieving process.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one, Ministry Focus, discusses the pastoral care model the writer created for urban African American congregants coping with loss and grief. The writer opens the chapter by sharing her personal experiences of loss and grief from childhood through the present time. She then presents the context for the project, which is the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church (JTMBC) and its community located in urban Columbus, Ohio. The conjunction of the writer's spiritual journey with her objective to help others in grief culminated in the proposed research. While serving the congregants of JTMBC, the writer recognized the need for pastoral care ministry to the sick, bereaved,

[1]Ps 30: 5.

and hurting congregants and their families. After completing her research the writer found that the Black Church is the foundation for a solution to help fulfill the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of its members and the community.

Chapter two, The State of the Art in Ministry, reviews some relevant literature that discusses the challenges, obstacles, and setbacks evolving around the African American Church and community. The chapter also reviews literature on grief, loss, and healing by writers like C. S. Lewis and Henri Nouwen, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, and Martin Luther King.

Chapter three, Theoretical Foundations, gives the historical, biblical, and theological rationale to validate the study.

Chapter four, Methodology, presents the setting for the study, the study design, data collection, participants, procedure, and measurement and data analysis.

Chapter five, Field Experience, provides data collecting results from the journals, the grief support group discussions, as well as an in-depth interview.

Finally, chapter six is a culmination of the writer's reflections. It summarizes the field experience, makes recommendations, and offers conclusive remarks.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The area of ministry on which this dissertation focuses is pastoral care. The writer created a pastoral care model for urban African American congregants coping with loss and grief. The proposed project discusses the various strategies for the grieving process identified by the support group that the writer formed to help five African American congregants in Columbus, Ohio who are presently experiencing loss and grief. Among the coping strategies the writer used with the support group are writing reflexive journals, lamenting and sharing one's story with the group, singing, Scripture reading, as well as meditation and prayer.

Henri Nouwen,[1] a Catholic priest, likens ministers who assist the bereaved to first responders in emergencies. Nouwen based his concept of healing on psychiatrist Carl Jung's[2] archetype of the wounded healer. In his book, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society,* Nouwen argues that even if the minister him/herself may be wounded, s/he can come to a place of healing where s/he can minister to others. This is what this writer has set out to do. As a wounded healer herself, she has committed to identifying strategies to help herself and participants in the support group move through

[1]Henri Josef Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday, 1994).

[2]Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Vol 9, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

the grieving process. This study is intended to provide a model for skilled and trained ministers or laypersons who can serve as physicians or wounded healers.[3]

The Writer

Many personal experiences of loss and grief from childhood through the present time led this writer to embrace the topic of loss and grief. As early as at the age of thirteen, the writer's spiritual journey was impacted by the death of her two-month-old nephew, Cornelius. While she had already accepted God into her life prior to that time, the loss of this innocent baby whom she had grown to love caused her initial relationship with God to become very focused, deliberate, and intentional.

The writer already knew about God; she grew up with parents in the ministry. When this traumatic death occurred, however, she had an epiphany. Life was no longer the same for her. Eternal life and death had suddenly become a reality. The writer, at thirteen, wanted so much to scream the grief out or cry it out. Questions and fears became a part of her inquisitive self—questions and fears about her own mortality. If a two-month-old baby could die, no one else could be exempt, herself included. For the next two years, she shook with fear every night before falling asleep, wondering whether she might be next, or who? The vision of her nephew dying in her younger sister's arms invaded her thoughts. She wondered, "What went wrong?" "Why did Cornelius have to die?" The joy of a new baby was so exciting; and without warning, the joy had turned into mourning and grief. She began deep soul searching and went on a quest to find answers to so many questions she carried inside. She made a clear decision to receive salvation. So she prayed and read her Bible.

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[3]Nouwen.

After a time, the writer seemed to find a new normal, and moved on with living her life. The family never got to see the baby's first tooth, first steps, or hear his first word. Just like that, he was snatched away and never heard from again, and no one talked about the loss of Cornelius anymore. To complicate matters, the child's mother, the writer's sister, had an emotional relapse every year on the birth date and death date of the baby, causing the rest of the family to relive the trauma. There was no formal grieving process. She and her family dealt with their grief and loss, as so many African-American families and church congregants do, with prayer, vibrant church services, and family and church cookouts. They relied on the strong sense of community that the African American Church provided. They also relied on their extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins who provided new dramas that drowned out some of their grief and served as a significant source of support with their willingness to accept them.

After a few years, the family relocated from Albany, New York to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The writer began to flourish in her spiritual relationship with God. She knew that she wanted to go to heaven. One day, she heard an audible voice of God telling her to begin nightly prayers with her younger siblings, which she did. In addition, her father began to give her Bible study lessons after her prayer meetings with her brothers and sisters. Without intention or aspiration, she became the model child of her minister parents. The adults in the church and community would mention her as a role model for the other youth. Her aim was not to gloat in the compliments, but be obedient to God. She felt empowered as her parents affirmed her as a trustworthy teenager. While their church, the Church of God in Christ, did not encourage any books other than the *King James*

Version Bible, she would go to the library to study biblical concordances. While still in high school, she was given a Junior High Sunday School class to teach. Twelve years after the death of her nephew, the writer's faith was challenged by another loss. Her fifteen-year-old sister Cecilia was hospitalized with a cancerous brain tumor. In agony, the writer demanded of God, "My sister Cecilia is dying and where are you, God?" Cecilia had been only fifteen. Oh! How it gripped the writer's heart, when Cecilia was pronounced dead just sixteen days before her sweet sixteenth birthday. The writer had always prayed, and seemingly, most of her prayers had been answered, especially major prayers like this. However now, her faith in God was shattered. She felt like God had let her down. Her mind was cloudy and grief had crippled her prayer life. She wondered what God she could believe in. The following ten years, she was no longer able to pray with confidence. At the same time, she was the family prayer intercessor; she was the one who would call family prayer meetings together. She found herself angry at God because she felt God had been healing and answering others' prayers, but not *hers*. The isolation and abandonment that she felt from God was enormous. Why had God not healed her sister?

For the next five years, she went on a quest to find the real God. She studied other religions to find out where God lived and how God treated the faithful. She thought she had been taught about the wrong God. She turned to Christian Science, to Buddhism and Hinduism, to the Unitarian Church, and even tried attending services at a synagogue. Each of the religions seemed to provide, temporarily, a gentler God. For a time, Buddhism seemed to speak to her, with its intense focus on human suffering and its causes. Finally, she checked out New Age movements like the Hare Krishna, which also

disappointed her because of their general, I'm OK, you're OK outlook. It seemed, they were superficially contented with their lot.

On the fifth anniversary of her sister's death, the writer had an extraordinary encounter. She had a dream in which her sister Cecilia told her that she had heard her prayers while she was in a coma before she passed. In the dream, Cecilia appeared to be very happy. As the writer came out of the dream state, she heard God speaking to her in a still, small voice. God said, "You have been condemning and have not forgiven God. You have already sentenced God to life in prison without the possibility of parole. You have been judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense attorney, yet God has never had a trial." God continued, "If you want to be fair, give me a trial and I want to take the witness stand. Before you throw the prison door keys away, let me testify." God took charge and began to ask her, "Whom do I listen to when someone is dying?"

It was only then that the writer realized Cecilia had a prayer too. "Tell me," God said, "Whom do I listen to when all my children are talking to me and asking for something different than the wishes of the one on the dying bed? And by the way, make sure you put Cecilia on the witness stand too, and find out what *she* wanted." The writer was speechless because as she reminisced, she knew her sister must have wanted to die and be with God instead of remaining on this earth with her excruciating pain. In her awake hours the following day, the writer continued to hear God saying, "Put me on the witness stand."

This was a *kairos* moment and the writer began to see how self-centered and dependent she had been upon her own prayers for her sister's healing. Her suffering had been selfishly about what would happen to *her* once her sister died. After her encounters

with her sister and God, she finally gave some thought to her sister's pain at the time of her death. The writer could not comprehend the measure of pain her sister must have endured. As time went on, this new epiphany caused the writer to decide that she must first find out what the sick or dying person wants, and *then* pray according to *their* desire. She also learned that she stands on holy ground when people are dying.

At the age of thirty-six, after many years of a downward spiral of grief and a sincere search for God, the writer found herself divorced and traveling from Augusta, Georgia with her seven-year-old son, to visit her ailing father at the hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Her seventy-six-year-old dad's final words to her before he passed were that God would bless her and her son for coming to see him in his time of affliction. Soon after the loss of her father, who had been her primary spiritual advisor, the writer started a new chapter in her life, enrolling in the Master of Divinity program at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was elated with this shift into victory. Following graduation three years later, she joined the army reserves as chaplain.

She found the chaplaincy rewarding because unlike church ministry, where female ministers are not respected, the military families and soldiers who were in pain were receptive to and appreciative of her ministry and the Word of God. Most of the people were strangers in pain, and not familiar church members; most were patients in the hospital, or others came to her with marriage or work crises. They were not interested in theological or doctrine debates, but simply wanted to express themselves in prayer and receive answers to their prayers. They merely wanted to be healed.

It was during this new ministry that the writer was emotionally challenged by the death of her mother, who had been her female spiritual nurturer and her personal

cheerleader all her life. She felt orphaned at the age of forty-one, and as though all of her inspiration and source of support had passed away with her mother. For a long time, it seemed as though no one could ever fill the emptiness left by the loss of her mother. While dealing with her own grief, the writer found it difficult to serve as army chaplain and as a healer for others in pain. She would sit in the grief with a patient or family. There were people who had been hurt in the war or family members who needed to know why God allowed their loved ones to suffer and die. She prayed and counseled with many who had received a terminal diagnosis of cancer or had a miscarriage, and the writer baptized many of the babies at the request of grieving parents. She also shared the pain of young couples that had lost the chance of ever having children for one medical reason or another. When those to whom she ministered expressed their gratitude, she knew the ministry of presence that she provided worked. However, the writer also found that the grief she witnessed was overwhelming and she herself felt the need for a chaplain and for God's strength, which she sometimes felt immediately through the ministry and support of the other chaplains.

While serving as army chaplain, the writer enrolled in a Clinical Pastoral Education Residency program for further training to look at how and why to do ministry. The residency was intended to help her work through her own issues without bleeding on the ones to whom she was ministering. This formal pastoral care training came to the writer's aid recently when her eldest brother lay dying of terminal cancer in a nursing facility in Maine. Her dying brother wished to be brought to Ohio, to spend his final days and be buried with his parents.

This time, the writer was able to apply the difficult lessons she had learned at her sister's passing, as well as at her nephew and parents' passing. She set out to honor and fulfill her brother's wish, despite the medical risk of transporting him in his frail state. However, the nursing facility called in the Maine police force against the family. When it seemed as if all hope was lost, she called her husband and asked him to pray to God for a miracle. She stood looking out the hotel window with a contrite spirit. Feeling defeated, she prayed: "God, we need a miracle, we need you to part the Red Sea."

The miracle the writer prayed for did happen. She was able to negotiate her brother's release to her care the following day, so that he could spend his final forty days with his family in Columbus, Ohio. This gave the family a chance to make peace with him. Her brother gave each member a blessing on their life, which reminded the writer of the blessings from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob. The writer's act of courage to stand up for her brother's wishes despite strong opposition from the establishment earned her newfound respect within her family, as well as among many of her brother's colleagues and friends.

The personal losses the writer endured reminded her she is here on earth as a wounded healer to minister to others through the grieving process they share. She thus embarked on the current project. Ironically, while the writer was in the midst of researching for this project and writing about the grieving process, she was confronted by the sudden loss of her husband, her most precious spiritual mainstay. Presently, she writes this proposal as she has unexpectedly found herself coping with the vicissitudes of life day to day, without her husband. Therefore, she is not conducting mere research, but is wrestling with the poignant reality of grief, pain, and loss, and the questions of why,

how, and where is God? Her new reality makes her seek even more urgently the strategies for healing that she has set out to discover, so that she can help others, as well as herself, through her ministry.

The Context

The context for this project is the thirty-five-member Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in a predominately African American urban neighborhood on the East side of Columbus, Ohio. The writer implemented a pastoral care model to help those who suffer from loss and grief. The support group is intended to equip urban African American congregants with strategies to cope with loss and grief.

The Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church was founded in the early 1950s as a family church and steadily grew into approximately 300 members until the mid-1990s. Around 1995, membership began to decline steadily until there were approximately 100 members at the time of the founder's death in 2001. The church seems to have made a difficult transition to its current pastor. According to some longtime members, the process of securing a new pastor following the death of the founding pastor was intense. It included interviewing and assessing over twenty-nine candidate pastors. After a three-year pastoral search, the current pastor began to serve in 2004, when membership was approximately seventy-five. The decline in numbers, according to members, was due to the ailing health of the pastor and his unwillingness to respond to the needs of the congregation. The current membership consists of approximately thirty-five churchgoers.

Many of the older members reminisce about the church in its glory days. That was a time of spiritual vibrancy, jubilant choirs, church travel trips, energetic youth

ministry, strong church and family community, etc. Of the total church membership, 75% are considered senior citizens, including its pastor. The members and leadership of the church have contention regarding the structure of the church. There has been friction between the members regardless of age, yet all ages' work together on various events.

The Conjunction

The conjunction of the writer's spiritual journey, and her objective to help others in grief culminated in the proposed research. Thus, this project grew out of the intersection of the passion of the writer's personal life experiences of grief and loss and her spiritual and academic interest in finding strategies for the aftercare of grievers. The writer hopes that her spiritual journey and the project can expand beyond her own healing, so that others may benefit, as well.

The word synergy is a combined action or operation when parts work together, complementing and augmenting one another, to create an outcome greater than the individual parts alone. The origin of the word is from the Modern Latin *synergia,* which means cooperation and from Greek *synergos,* which means working together and helping one another in work.[4] For the believer, engaging in a synergy with God through the Holy Spirit creates purpose and passion, which is transformative, and has the power to transform others.[5] The writer, as a believer in the Christian faith, in cooperation with God's grace, hopes to experience a synergistic relationship with the Holy Spirit which

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[4]Merriam-Webster, *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster Mass Market, 2004).

[5]F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: First Hendricks Publishing, 2007).

can transform her; in turn, through implementing the grieving process she hopes to allow others, to whom she ministers, the opportunity for transformation.

The Problem

The writer undertook this study because she was disturbed by the lack of pastoral care ministry to the sick, bereaved, and hurting congregants and their families at African American Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church. Prior to the current study, the church had not engaged in any formal grief-care for families of its deceased members. Even when the church's founder of nearly half a century passed away, the JTMBC did not hold any aftercare service. When a member passed away or someone in the congregation lost a loved one, little was done to help the mourners beyond holding a funeral and a repast. Grievers were left to their own devices. The writer saw the void among the members from this lack of pastoral and grief-aftercare and she created a model for JTMBC and its community.

In her capacity as a volunteer chaplain of the JTMBC for the past five years, the writer eulogized several funerals and witnessed various losses that the congregants experienced. Witnessing a lack of aftercare from the church, she offered personal counsel to many grievers in the congregation. Through her observations and conversations with the congregants, the writer noted that congregants who were grieving a loss were not receiving any kind of substantial pastoral care or aftercare from the church. In fact, several members and their families had sought counsel from her regarding their losses and the grief they experienced, expressing to her that they wished the church would support them in their loss. They said they wished there would be follow-up care, phone calls, and visitations beyond the immediate funeral ceremony and repast. Other church

members let the writer know that this lack of support was part of the reason they left JTMBC.

The writer's own experience of feeling unsupported after the losses of her brother and husband gave her an even closer experience of the lack of support JTMBC offers. Her losses allowed her to identify and empathize with the bereaved congregants' complaints. For example, during the week of the funeral ceremony and repast upon the passing of the writer's husband, the pastor and congregants at first did a superb job of grief-care. Before the funeral, the pastor visited the home of the writer and held a family prayer in which the writer found comfort. However, there was no follow-up. The writer believes that one reason for the lack of aftercare given at JTMBC is the pastor's ill health, which appears to impede his ministry of pastoral care. Another reason may be the pastor's limited training and knowledge on pastoral care and aftercare. Regardless, the problem remained until now: the church did not offer pastoral care or grief after-care to its congregants.

The congregants' complaints about the lack of support at JTMBC led the writer to believe the congregants and their families would benefit from a grief support group organized officially and led by a trained professional who can offer grief counseling and care. She thus set out to develop and implement a model of a grief support group. Some churches do offer grief-aftercare and support for congregants experiencing a loss. However, very little research to date has evaluated the impact of grief-care and support in African American churches for an extended period of time following a member's loss. The writer therefore hopes to contribute to the research on grief support groups within the

African American Church. Toward this end, the writer implemented a model of grief-aftercare at JTMBC.

Foundation for a Solution

The writer's research relies on the Black Church, as the foundation for a solution because the church helps fulfill the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of its members.[6] A strong religious orientation is seen as the strength of Black families. From her observations, research, and personal experiences both as a congregant and a chaplain, the writer found that the Black Church serves as a mainstay for African Americans to begin the process of grieving. It plays an integral role in African American funerals and is a primary means of social support for the bereaved.[7]

The Black Church has a long historical relationship with its members, and is second only to the family as an important social institution of support.[8] Church is usually the place where receptions are held following a funeral. A well-known rite called the funeral meal is often held in the church to support the family so that its members do not have to be alone when dealing with the loss of their loved one.[9] However, the writer came to believe that the church needed more fulfilling devices to help mourners through the grieving process. She also believed that pastoral care needed to implement long-term

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[6]P. Barr, "Guilt, Shame, and Grief Following Prenatal Bereavement: Synopsis of an Empirical Study". *Psychology and Psychotherapy,* 77 (2004), 493-510.

[7]N. Martinek, "Measuring Core Bereavement Phenomena," Psychological Medicine 27 (2007): 49-57.

[8]Robert Taylor, *Church-based Support Programs for Elderly Black Adults: Congregational and Clergy Characteristics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 306-324.

[9]Andrew Billingsley, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," *Journal of Negro Education* 60(3), (2004): 427-440.

grieving strategies. The writer therefore formed a support group and developed effective strategies to help participants move through the grieving process.

Nouwen discusses and gives evidence to support that often, those who provide pastoral care for those in pain are wounded themselves in some way and they speak from experience as they minister to the needs of others. The writer uses Jung's archetype of the wounded healer to serve as the foundation for a solution, which is to assist grievers move through the grieving process. In the words of Nouwen, the wounded healer is "the one who must look after his own wounds, and at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others."[10] S/he can tap into his or her own pain to minister to others in pain. S/he has to be skilled enough to bind his/her own wounds while binding the wounds of others.[11]

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN HIS MINISTRY PROJECT

This literature review examines some relevant literature by Christian theologians who discuss grief and loss. It also reviews literature that discusses the challenges, obstacles, and setbacks around the African American Church and community. The writer believes that reviewing some of the relevant literature that discusses oppression, pain, grief, and liberation will aid in finding strategies for coping with grief and loss.

African American theologian Jacquelyn Grant[1] believes that sexism creates a problem of inequality for women in Christology and inhibits women's progress. Grant discusses the theological dilemma of women and writes that Christology is challenging for women because it limits women in general. She argues that Christology poses a challenge for feminists because Jesus is undeniably a male. Therefore, Grant argues that Jesus is used to exclude or limit women in Christianity.

In particular, Grant explains the pivotal role religion plays in the lives and development of African Americans. She addresses the issue of women in the African American religion and culture. Grant regards Black women as a significant minority group in America that believes that Christ plays a prevailing role in their lives. In her book, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response,* she talks about the problems and casualties in African American

[1]Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989).

culture, especially the denial of power and leadership to Black women in the church.[2] Black women are a significant minority group of women in America who have also claimed that Christ plays a dominant role in their lives. Yet they have not been given the honor and respect they have earned.[3]

Grant believes that until women are liberated, the inequality tears at the fabric of the Black family, church, and community. This inequality stifles the help the church could offer to those in their grieving process because it hinders women in the church from contributing to creating a healthy community that could be possible. Grant's purpose in her writing is to bring an awareness of this dilemma between genders and the mission of Christ. [4]

Like Grant, Renita Weems[5] challenges the Christian community to allow women's voices to be heard in regard to the pain that women have endured socially, physically, and spiritually. In her book, *Just a Sister Away,* she traces the connection of women today to women in past generations, all the way back to the Bible. She gives examples of biblical women to explore pain, both emotional and spiritual, to connect with present-day women. She discusses women in the Bible like Hagar and Sarah, Vashti and Esther, to name a few. Though some are eminent, others are obscure. Weems's purpose is to empower women to enhance their own personal lives, while learning lessons from both historical and contemporary women. She reveals some of her own life experiences along

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 101-105.

[4]Cone.

[5]Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection between Women of Today* and *Women in the Bible*, 1st Warner Books ed. (West Bloomfield, MI: Walk Worthy Press, 2005).

with those of biblical women to help contemporary women glean lessons from their stories.

Grant and Weems point out that even though women are usually more economically challenged than men, and perhaps African American women are more so, Black women continue to financially support the church more. They point out that while African American women are the largest supporters of the Black church, they hold the least amount of proportionate power. Furthermore, Black women have been a source of strength both in the home, the church, and the community. Weems berates the Christian community for its lack of recognition and support of Black women's sacrifices. She argues that Black women should be acknowledged for their ability to endure pain and their unsung heroic and selfless leadership skills should be embraced.[6]

Howard Thurman book, *Jesus and the Disinherited,*[7] he identifies with the religion of Jesus after a confrontation he has with a Hindu man on his visit to India. The Hindu man cannot understand Thurman's commitment to Christianity, given the atrocities that Christians have committed toward people of African descent throughout history. He reminds Thurman of the slavery of Africans which was perpetrated by Christians. Thurman explains that he sees Jesus as one who came for the disinherited and oppressed people, some of whom were descendants of his African ancestors. In his book, Thurman demonstrates how the Gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised.

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[6]Ibid.

[7]Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

Thurman refers to Jesus as a partner in the pain of the oppressed and states that the example of Jesus's life offers a solution to ending the descent into moral nihilism. He demonstrates how the Gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised.

Swiss American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross pioneered near-death studies. In her book, *On Death and Dying*,[8] she introduced her theory of the five stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—to help people through the grieving process. The stages are not in any particular order but are subjective and personal to each griever and they can be transferred to circumstances of loss and emotional upset other than death and dying, such as job loss, sickness, relocation, hardship in a relationship and/or break up, divorce, financial difficulty, and others.

Kübler-Ross's stages of grief are as follows: The first stage, denial, is a natural defense mechanism for someone confronted by loss. It may be undertaken consciously or unconsciously, as a person tries to cope with the reality of loss. The second stage, anger, is a strong emotion when people are faced with loss that causes them to be upset with themselves or with others who are close to them. The third stage is bargaining, when people try to cut a deal with God, believing that the circumstances can be changed if the bargain is accepted. However, this stage rarely results in the desired solution. The fourth stage, depression, involves levels of sadness, regret, fear, and uncertainty, moving toward accepting the reality of one's circumstances. However, although one is moving toward acceptance, it does not necessarily eliminate the pain. The final stage is acceptance.

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[8] Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969).

Usually, people who are dying come to grips with their own mortality before their loved ones do. Such acceptance relieves the person of emotional attachment. Following the stages of grief defined by Kübler-Ross can be useful and may provide a framework for understanding and coping with the grieving process.

In *A Grief Observed,* Christian theologian and writer C. S. Lewis[9] allows the reader to encompass some of his most intimate and sacred thoughts and feelings of grief after the loss of his wife to cancer. He discusses the debilitating pain and agony of losing someone so intertwined with his very being. Lewis's expression of raw emotions leads him to question his experience with life and his confrontation and anger with God. He also finds a way, through his journal of grieving his own loss, to publish *A Grief Observed.* Journaling accounts of Lewis's grieving process assist him to continue the journey of his life in victory despite his pain.

According to C. S. Lewis, while the mind may grasp evil or loss and grief rationally to some degree, the emotions cannot follow suit so readily. Thus, the person vacillates between the stability of the intellect and the turmoil of the emotions. Therefore, it is not primarily a matter of attempting to solve the problem of evil or loss and grief from an intellectual perspective. Rather, one must deal with the impact of loss and grief emotionally.[10] Still, many people attempt to deny their pain and grief; hoping to circumvent their pain, some Christians use Scriptures and others use clichés.

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[9]C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001).

[10]Ibid.

Like Thurman, German Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer[11] properly acknowledges loss and suffering. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he discusses the importance of each person bearing his or her own cross, for one can only overcome grief if one accepts it and goes through the grieving process. To bare the cross proves to be the only way of triumphing over suffering. … Jesus prays to His Father that the cup may pass from Him, and His Father hears His prayer; for the cup of suffering will indeed pass from Him—but only by His drinking it.[12]Thus, the only way out of one's grief is to drink the cup of suffering. Bonhoeffer believes in a greater purpose beyond personal suffering. In speaking of the Church and its response to suffering he writes: "The community of strangers find their comfort in the cross, they are comforted by being cast upon the place where the Comforter of Israel awaits them. Thus do they find their true home with their crucified Lord, both here and in eternity."[13]

When the Church of the faithful is in community, members find comfort in one another through the cross, which is a symbol of suffering. Personal suffering thus is transformed into a community of sufferers who support one another toward the greater cause. This greater cause is to alleviate God's pain through comforting one's fellow believers within the community.[14]

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[11]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 1st ed. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995).

[12]Ibid., 101.

[13]Ibid., 121-122.

[14]Ibid.

Psychologist Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter in his book *Black Grief and Soul Therapy*[15] challenges those of good character to act on behalf of those who have experienced a life cycle of grief. He observes that unfortunately in some cases, those in a position of leadership may turn out to be hurtful to members of the congregation seeking relief from their pain because they may not have addressed their own woundedness. If the leader is not healed, how can he or she heal others? Cooper-Lewter describes good character as a sign of healthy self-image. If a person has good character, he or she can achieve his or her full human potential. Such people have some of the traits identified by Cooper-Lewter, which are listed below.

- Deep Roots in the Search for Freedom
- Have a God-Centered Self-Esteem and Other Appreciation
- The Ability to See the Invisible
- Respect for the Privilege of Living
- Commitment to Self-Improvement and Purposeful Living
- Quest for Discipline
- Always Seeking the Greatest Good
- Refusing to Construct Life Out of the Negative and Passive
- Quest for Magnitude[16]

Therefore, according to Cooper-Lewter a person seeking healing from pain must look for spiritual leaders with these characteristics. The writer kept in mind these characteristics to strengthen the strategies in her model.

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[15]Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, *Black Grief & Soul Therapy* (Charlottesville, VA: Harriet Tubman Press, 1999).

[16]Ibid., 35-40.

In his book, *African American Pastoral Care*, Edward Wimberly[17] states the vital importance of pastoral care in the Black church. He discusses how pastoral care takes place both in the large congregation and in small groups, "gathered for Bible reading, exhortation, and prayer and song services to heal physical ills, emotional wounds, and relational hurts."[18] Wimberly believes pastors need to be attentive and mindful as they train their congregants to minister to one another. He writes: "Although black church worship has been celebrated in literature as emotionally therapeutic for African American Christians, the strength of the worship life has not been limited to the Sunday morning service."[19]

Wimberly states that pastoral care within a local Black congregation is a response pattern to God's unfolding story in the congregation's midst. This unfolding story is one of liberation as well as healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. As a response to God's story, the caring resources of the local black church are used to draw those within the church, as well as those outside the church, into God's unfolding story. . . As a response to being drawn into God's story and finding care and love, pastors and laity alike commit themselves to be part of God's ongoing story of liberation and healing.[20]

Wimberly contends that a crisis of loss disrupts one's life patterns and interactions. He calls this the disruption of a narrative.[21] "The death of a loved one causes a revising of the story one has been living. For some, a death means fashioning a

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[17]Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, rev. ed. (Kindle Edition, 2008).

[18]Ibid., 438-443.

[19]Ibid., 439.

[20]Ibid., 441.

[21]Ibid., 438.

completely new story for one's life. The crisis is personal and individual, and so is the story about it."[22]

In other words, out of the pain, one has to find a new normal to continue life, as it will be different after the pain of loss. In so doing, one can transform one's pain as one progresses through the grieving process and achieves victory.

In *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities,* Robert Michael Franklin notes that it will take a village to raise a child, a family, and ultimately a community.[23] Franklin contends that healing of the pain and grief among African Americans begins with the family, the church, and the community. It is in these environments where African Americans hold power and control for reconciliation and healing. He believes that a solution to the African American problem of historical loss and grief can be found in the concept of unity within community. As he writes in his book, "Neighborhoods become villages when all of the adults step up to show care and concern for all of the children. Villages need real grown-ups. Moreover, the hard and slow work of healing and reconciling broken people and fractured relationships that will in turn restore larger institutions must begin with these grown-ups, no matter what their age) inside local institutions."[24]

Franklin concludes that, after all, all Americans live in villages; and therefore he suggests we "should aspire to transform them into beloved communities."[25]

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[22]Ibid.

[23]Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 3.

[24]Ibid., 3.

[25]Ibid.

Franklin notes that most leaders do not have the time for the pain and reconciliation that congregation members need. He believes that the struggle and pain among African Americans are displayed so vividly until one can see even their ancestral, historical pain. Franklin recommends that church leaders need to listen and learn from their congregants as they present their pain, aspirations, and struggles. In other words, there must begin to be cohesiveness for healing among the family, the church, and the community at large.[26]

Traditionally, African Americans have relied on leaders and activists of liberation of racial injustice, such as Martin Luther King, Booker T. Washington, Malcolm X, and W. E. B. Dubois to name a few, who have challenged the moral thinking and social injustice in the United States. However, Franklin contends, in his book *Liberating Visions*,[27] "Both the Bible and America's constitutive documents have furnished black moral thinkers with symbols, normative concepts and historical understandings and narratives with which to elaborate the African-American quest for justice and human fulfillment."[28]

Franklin uses the term *authentic freedom* to refer to the "absence of structural and psychological obstacles to achieving personal development, and to the positive capacity to actualize one's fullest human potential."[29] As a people, African Americans have traditionally used the Bible and constitutional documents as a means to convey their message of moral justice.

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[26]Ibid.

[27]Robert Michael Franklin, *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African-American Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

[28]Ibid., 1.

[29]Ibid.

In *Black Theology: A Documentary History,* [30] Wilmore and Cone assert Black women and men should be encouraged to consider teaching and writing as a form of ministry that is just as challenging and important as preaching and singing. Thus, the minister can answer theological and social questions on "What does it mean to be Black, Christian and free?"[31] When one can tell one's own story, there is more accuracy in the firsthand account of the facts being recounted; the narration tends to be more authentic, and therefore more effective.

[30]Gayraud S. Wilmore and James Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Set Volumes I & II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

[31]Ibid., 4.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Historical Foundations of African American Grief and Loss

Grief that is caused by loss is a common human experience and yet a very personal one, requiring personal care and attention to the griever. This is true for African Americans in particular, who have had to cope with unbearable grief throughout their history of slavery and segregation. They therefore do not only suffer from personal grief, but also the collective grief of their race. African Americans can trace a long history of finding spiritual comfort in adversity, given their history of slavery.[1] Enslaved Africans brought with them a strong and powerful spiritual orientation, which has been described as core to the African personality.[2] This strong spirituality sustained African slaves in the United States and gave them the capability they needed to withstand the oppression of bondage. Church, when slaves were allowed to attend, provided social contact and religious comfort and gave slaves a place to express their pain, anger, and humiliation.[3]

Today, the Black Church continues to play a central role in the lives of many African Americans and helps fulfill the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of its

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[1]Anna Laurie & Robert A. Neimeyer, "Of Broken Bonds and Bondage: An Analysis of Loss in the Slave Narrative Collection", *Death Studies 34* (3).

[2]Ibid.

[3]Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

members.[4] The Church has a long historical relationship with its members, and is second only to the family as an important social institution of support.[5] A strong religious orientation is seen as the strength of Black families. For many African Americans, involvement in the Church is not limited to attendance at Sunday morning services, but includes activities throughout the week, such as dinners and choir rehearsals.[6] The lives of elderly African Americans stand as a testimony to the strength and endurance of Black Americans who have been able to survive amidst a history of racism and oppression.[7]

Historically, the Black Church provided African slaves the opportunity to be given respect that those who did not belong to the Church did not receive.[8] In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Lincoln states that individuals who possess a strong religious orientation tend to also have a more positive outlook on life, and therefore the Church's support is essential to the congregants' well being. Lincoln identifies the seven major historic Black denominations that comprise "the Black Church." These are the African Methodist Episcopal (AME); the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ); the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) church; the National Baptist Convention, USA., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention

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[4]P. Barr, "Guilt, Shame, and Grief Following Prenatal Bereavement: Synopsis of an Empirical Study", *Psychology and Psychotherapy, 77* (2004), 493-510.

[5]Robert Taylor, *Church-based Support Programs for Elderly Black Adults: Congregational and Clergy Characteristics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 306-324.

[6]Ibid., 307.

[7]Andrew Billingsley, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," *Journal of Negro Education* 60(3), (2004), 427-440.

[8]Billingsley, *Mighty like a River,* 48.

(PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).[9] Regardless of the denomination, the common thread throughout the Black Church is that it helps to fulfill the social, psychological, and spiritual needs of its members.[10]

Many African Americans are either Baptist or Methodist, one reason being that these two denominations of Christianity are similar to the religion of West Africa. Christianity reinforced traditional African beliefs.[11] For example, baptism by immersion, speaking in tongues, and an emotional atmosphere during the service in the Baptist Church are all very similar to traditions in African religions.[12] The importance of spiritual leaders in the Black Church also has its roots in African religions.[13] African American spiritual leaders are looked upon with great respect in the African American community, as they are in Africa.[14] So central are these church leaders among African Americans that anyone who desires change or action within the Black community must negotiate and consult with Black preachers.[15] This bestows upon the Black minister an aura of power and influence within the Black community and beyond.

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[9]Charles Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

[10]Ibid., 202-203.

[11]David Balk, "Death, Bereavement, and College Students: A Descriptive Analysis," *Mortality 2* (April 2007), 207-220.

[12]T. Attig, "Meaning of Death Seen through the Lens of Grieving," *Death Studies 28* (2003), 341-360.

[13]Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

The Black Church plays an integral part in African American funerals and is a primary means of social support for the bereaved.[16] From antebellum slavery to the twenty-first century, African American funeral directors have orchestrated funerals or homegoing ceremonies with dignity and pageantry.[17] The Church is usually the place where receptions are held after funerals. A well-known rite called the funeral meal is often held in the Church to support the family so that they do not have to deal with the loss of their loved one alone.[18] Some of the Negro spirituals and hymnals that continue to be used to help African Americans cope with grief and loss are quoted below:

I Will Trust in the Lord[19]

I will trust in the Lord,
I will trust in the Lord,
I will trust in the Lord
'Til I die.

I will trust in the Lord
I will trust in the Lord
I will trust in the Lord
'Til I die.

I'm gonna stay on bended knee,
I'm gonna stay on bended knee
I'm gonna stay on bended knee
'Til I die.

I'm gonna stay on bended knee,
I'm gonna stay on bended knee,
I'm gonna stay on bended knee,
'Til I die. ."I Will Trust in the Lord."

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[16]N. Martinek, "Measuring Core Bereavement Phenomena," *Psychological Medicine* 27 (2007): 49-57.

[17]Billingsley, "The Church, the Family," 427-440.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Delores Carpenter and Nolan E. Williams Jr., eds., *African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago, IL: Gia Publications, 2001), 391.

We've Come This Far by Faith[20]

We've come this far by faith
leaning on the Lord;
trusting in His Holy Word
He's never failed me yet.
Oh can't turn around.

The Black National Anthem, "*Life Every Voice and Sing,*" written by James Weldon Johnson:

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,[21]
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies,
Let is resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days
when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way
that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path
thro' the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from a gloomy past,
till now we stand at last

[20]Ibid., 412.

[21]Ibid., 540.

Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places
Our God where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world
we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Yet another popular hymn is "Amazing Grace," written by John Newton, one of the very persons who was directly involved in the transatlantic slave trade, as was his father. When Newton later saw the error of his ways and repented, he wrote several hymnals, including "Amazing Grace,"[22] which has become a well-known and cherished hymn that Americans, as well as African Americans, have come to rely on especially at times of grief.

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)[23]
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, hut now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!

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[22]*Olney Hymns, in Three Books* (Banbury, UK: Cheney & Sons Ltd., 1984).

[23]Ibid.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The LORD has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But GOD, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.

There has been very little research conducted on the resilience of African Americans when they are faced with loss and grief.[24] In addition to the Black Church, there were role models within the community to whom oppressed African Americans could look for leadership as they fought their way from slavery to freedom.[25] For example, Frederick Douglass, a runaway slave, eventually became a spokesman for the abolition of slavery. As a young boy, he knew the value of becoming literate and the power of literacy, so he secretly learned how to read and write at great risk of being

[24]Billingsley, "The Church, the Family," 427-440.

[25]Ibid.

severely punished if caught, as it was in fact illegal for a slave to learn how to read and write.[26]

Frederick Douglass later became an advocate for education, given his own hard-earned learning. In his autobiography and other writings,[27] Douglass elaborates on the evils of slavery from personal experience. We learn in his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, how after his slave master died, he was sold as property along with animals for the contentious heirs. He gives a most devastating account of being torn from his grandmother and teacher with bitter weeping between them and the reality that they may be forever parted. As Douglass says in his autobiography, this experience left him with a greater vile for slavery, making him even more determined to fight to abolish it.[28] His writings about his personal struggle to gain his own freedom as well as to abolish slavery in the United States serve as a historical model of encouragement to African Americans at times of loss and grief.

Booker T. Washington is another example of an African American who survived the hardships of slavery and the early years of the abolition.[29] Washington is a role model to African Americans who may be experiencing times of adversity. Like Douglass, he believed in education as an answer to oppression.[30] Born into slavery (1858/1859), Washington knew neither his correct date of birth, nor who his father was. He was more familiar with his mother and her ancestors. He believed that while slavery was harsh, he

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[26]Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series Two: Autobiographical Writings, My Bondage and My Freedom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 78.

[77]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Plainview, NY: 2012), 56.

[30]Ibid., 10-15.

had not experienced harshness as did a vast number of slaves, since he lived most of his life as a free person. He discusses his home as a log cabin with dirt floors upon which he and his siblings slept on filthy rags. Learning to read was one of his strong desires, which he achieved.[31]

Eventually, upon freedom from slavery through the emancipation proclamation in 1865, Washington's mother bought him a dictionary, which he studied and began to read. He envied white boys who had not the obstacles to overcome to "become a Congressman, Governor, Bishop, [or] President by reason of the accident of his birth or race."[32] But in later years he said, "I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."[33] Washington first taught at Hampton University, a historical Black college in Virginia. He later became the President of Tuskegee Institute, a historical Black college in Alabama, where he promoted vocational education.[34]

Education, role models, community support, and religion continue to be central to the lives of most African Americans. Holloway contends in her book *Passed on African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial* that much of the wisdom of the tribal way of living, the legacy that could not be taken away from African Americans, was retained through the years to help them survive the hard times of slavery and the injustice and racism they faced day to day beyond slavery.[35] Without the support of a community and

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Karla Holloway, *Passed on; African American Mourning Stories, a Memorial* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

the living power of a theology that was genuinely practical, many African Americans would not have survived.[36] In the case of mental illness, for instance, "being welcomed in the house of prayer by a concerned and caring community can make a critical difference."[37] As Payne states, "[r]eligious communities are in a unique position to combat stigma and provide a message of acceptance and hope… a faith community may be the only place where a person with a mental illness truly feels accepted, valued, and loved."[38]

The Black Church does not only serve as an accepting place, but as a place where leadership offers a comforting and comfortable relationship with the congregation.[39] The sense of connectedness often extends beyond death, with the belief that the loved one has gone on to a better life. This faith holds true particularly for those who attend the Black Church and who have a strong, traditional Afrocentric belief system, which gives them an optimism that the relationship with their loved one has not ended. For the grieving, "death is seen not as a parting, but as a transition from this life to the next."[40] The leaders of the Church are pivotal in helping heal those who are experiencing loss and grief.

In their article, "Of Broken Bonds and Bondage: An Analysis of Loss in the Slave Narrative Collection," Laurie and Neimeyer explain:

> When mental health professionals or spiritual leaders attempt to help African Americans with their grief, they must first acknowledge the indelible imprint of

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Jennifer Payne, "Saints Don't Cry: Exploring Messages Surrounding Depression and Mental Health Treatment as Expressed by African-American Pentecostal Preachers," *Journal Of African American Studies*, 12 (2008), 215-228.

[38]Ibid., 222.

[39]Ibid., 223.

[40]Laurie and Neimeyer, 221-256.

> adversities and psychosocial consequences of a history of slavery and segregation. That unique history adds a layer of collective grief in addition to an individual African American's personal grief, both of which must be addressed.[41]

Jim Crow laws that boasted separate but equal treatment of Blacks made African Americans second-class citizens in the United States until the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, even beyond the Civil Rights Act, Black Americans have continued to suffer from discrimination.[42]

Liberto, Fennell, and Jeffries contend that given African Americans' "common memories of a past marked by segregation, racial discrimination, and exclusion, [their] histories are fraught with the denial of civil rights and full societal membership."[43] African Americans' common history of living under the shadow of the ideology of white supremacy and Black inferiority has given them a unique disposition, sadly making them mistrustful of outside, professional help and support groups.[44] For example, "[s]tudies have demonstrated that Blacks exhibit less trust in the health care system—including circumstances in which Blacks were victimized, such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study—and social and cultural distance between Black patients and White physicians."[45] This distrust exhibits itself through different mechanisms, given African Americans' personal experiences with racism and their collective memory of their history of slavery.

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[41]Ibid., 231.

[42]Ibid., 244.

[43]Ana Liberato, Dana Fennell, and William Jeffries, "I Still Remember America: Senior African Americans Talk About Segregation," *Journal Of African American Studies* 12 (2008), 229-242.

[44]Ibid., 232.

[45]Donald Musa, Richard Schulz, Roderick Harris, Myrna Silverman, Stephen B. Thomas, "Trust in the Health Care System and the Use of Preventive Health Services by Older Black and White Adults," *American* Journal *of Public Health 99* (July 2009), 1293-1299.

Unfortunately, African Americans' distrust of physicians and the health care system in turn contributes to further health care disparities. Therefore, most African-Americans do not seek help when they are depressed or grieving. If they decide to seek help, they first turn to a family member, their pastor or minister, or to a social worker in a non-mental health setting.[46] Liberato, Fennell, and Jeffries explain how in their research they used strategies of storytelling to encourage senior African Americans to talk about "their fear of violence, discrimination in public places, the racist actions of white Americans, the need to remain strong and respect one another, and family solidarity."[47] Storytelling helped African Americans create a common culture during segregation and at times of grieving. It is through storytelling that they continue to teach their children about their past and promote messages of self-worth, protection, and respect.[48]

A majority of African Americans report religious participation, religious coping, and spirituality at a much higher rate than the general American population.[49] Gladding states, the Black Church across the years has been a harbor of community and a safe place where congregants can experience a living theology.[50] The African American Church today continues to be one of the most accepting places an African American can go at a time of grief for solace and for a sense of belonging. As many authors contend, African Americans use many strategies to deal with grief and loss. However, training in grief strategies will strengthen the grief-aftercare support so many African American

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[46]Payne, 215-228.

[47]Liberato, Fennell, and Jeffries, 229-242.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Laurie and Neimeyer, 221-256.

[50]Samuel Gladding, *Family Therapy; History, Theory and Practice* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002).

Churches lack. Intentional grief-aftercare training will benefit the family, the Church, and the community.

Biblical Foundations of Grief and Loss

Grief is a natural but painful part of life, in which individuals need the compassionate ministry of pastoral care for guidance through difficult personal experiences. As Christian ministers guide, support, and nurture others through experiences of loss and grief, they turn to sacred scripture for guidance. Both the Old and the New Testaments provide examples of human suffering resulting from loss, the questions that it evokes, and how different individuals respond to that suffering. Below are discussed the book of Job in the Old Testament, and the story of Lazarus in the book of John in the New Testament.

Old Testament Scripture: The Book of Job

The Book of Job depicts the sufferings of a good man and leads the reader to question, why God allows bad things to happen to good people, illustrating the power of faith. Most scholars consider the book of Job to be the oldest text of the *Hebrew Bible*.[51] According to the *English Standard Bible*,[52] the Book of Job is portrayed as both a theological and a literary masterpiece. Below are some excerpts from the book of Job, followed by an exegesis of Job.

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[51]John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments: The Baptist Commentary Series* (Paris, AK: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989).

[52]Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible*, 1st ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Job 1:1-22

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the

> name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (NIV)[53]

In the first Chapter of the book of Job, Job is initially doing very well even as he suffers a number of losses. When God gives Satan permission to put Job's faith to the test, Job proves his faith in God by accepting his fate and not questioning God's loving sovereignty. Even as he is suffering, Job proclaims, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (19:25). Thus, God proves Job's trust in him (Ch. 42) to Satan. The end result of his test is to illustrate to Satan that true faith cannot be destroyed.[54]

In Chapter two, Job enters a spiritual crisis when his faith is challenged by further losses. As his suffering becomes unbearable, he sees the world as unjust.[55] According to *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*,[56] Job is humbled under God's hand. As Job reckons with his suffering, he acknowledges that the worldly goods he owns are not his, and that he cannot take them with him when he dies. His losses render him to a state of nothingness. He has nothing, is unclothed and unburdened. However, this state must not divert Job from worshipping God. It is especially at such times that one must turn to God, which is what Job does. Job is an example of how those in grief can respond to suffering with grace, dignity, and faith. His experiences prove the righteousness of the Lord.[57]

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[53]Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[54]Ibid.

[55]Gill.

[56]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987).

[57]Ibid.

Initially, Job is mindful and spiritual even as he suffers; he does not accuse God for his suffering.[58] However, as his unrecognizable afflictions increase and his physical pain worsens, he expresses his bitterness and pain and curses the day that he was born. In Chapter three he asks, "Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?"[59] Job also begins to ask the painful human questions of God.[60] In Chapter two, Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar meet to console and comfort him. His friends weep even before reaching him as they see his condition from a distance. Thus, they show the ministry of silence and support, while sitting with him speechless for seven days.[61]

Later, Job's friends begin to express their disapproval of Job's condition and to blame him for having sinned.[62] They firmly believe that Job must have done something; otherwise, God would not be punishing him. They also disapprove when Job expresses anger toward God. In response to his friends' accusations, Job maintains his innocence. He believes himself to be a righteous man and also bemoans that the wicked get away without having to pay for their actions. In 7:21 Job asks, "Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?"[63] He thus questions why God is not coming to his rescue.[64]

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[58]Ibid.

[59]Thomas Nelson, *New King James Version Holy Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

[60]Henry.

[61]Ibid.

[62]J. Alfred Smith Sr., ed. *Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections from J. Alfred Smith Sr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006).

[63]Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[64]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary On the Whole Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987).

Furthermore, Job wants to know, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?"[65] In saying this, Job expresses his disappointment that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. According to Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, this is a basic question raised in the book of Job: "Why are the righteous afflicted consistently with God's justice?"[66] The answer to this question comes from Elihu, who gets angry when he witnesses Job's three friends accuse him of sinning and condemn him for criticizing God. Elihu does not claim to have any special wisdom himself. He acknowledges that he is young and therefore requests permission to speak. In his speech Elihu explains, God is providential and has the final say and even the righteous must be held to a standard where sin is absent. Furthermore, Elihu argues that God has a merciful correction, and that God *must* be just (because He *is* God). He continues to tell Job and his friends that they are wrong in their interpretation of God and the reason for suffering.[67] Elihu tells Job that he is wrong to accuse God and that his suffering has the purpose of God's discipline. In Chapter 34, Elihu tells Job that he should seek God for answers as opposed to complaining about God. He urges Job to give God praises for being all-powerful and wise.[68]

According to the *New International Bible Commentary*, Job wants to have a confrontation with God regarding his suffering and lack of restoration.[69] This shows the human tendency to blame something outside of oneself, without knowing the mysteries

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[65]Jb 21:7

[66] Robert Jamieson, David Brown, and A. R. Fausset. *Bible Commentary: A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

[67]Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 533-546.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid.

of God and why pain and suffering are parts of life. As seen in 38-42:1, God finally sets the challenge for Job. God asks about the mystery of ten features of natural order (38:4-38) and "nine species from the animal kingdom" (38: 39-39:30).[70] God then urges Job to reconsider what he knows about God and the mysteries of the earth and the universe. In 40:2 God asks, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" In 40:4-5 Job replies and covers his mouth: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more." In 40:8-9 God continues to ask Job, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his?" After this conversation, Job is humbled to silence. He has nothing left to say or to complain about. He no longer feels he has reason to blame God for his suffering.

In the end, God reprimands Job's friends who accused Job of sinning.[71] In 42:10, after Job prays for his friends, God restores his fortunes and bestows upon him twice as much as he had before.[72] Job is given a new family of seven sons and three daughters, as well as sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and all material possessions, and he goes on to live a hundred and forty years, enjoying four generations of his children's children. The support of family and friends is needed both in times of trouble and during times of celebration, and Job's friends comfort and console him for all of the pain and suffering he

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[70]Ibid.

[71]Jamieson, Brown, and Fausset.

[72]Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 485-492.

has endured. The book of Job teaches about natural human response to suffering, about the human tendency to place blame outside of oneself, and about the triumph of faith.[73]

New Testament Scripture: John 11

The triumph of faith is also the theme in the story of Lazarus in John 11. Like the story of Job in the Old Testament, the story of Lazarus in the New Testament leads us into the mystery of life. In John 11, God through Jesus performs a shocking and unseen miracle. According to *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, the Book of John provides a synopsis of the ministry of Jesus. It "plunges us immediately into the heart of the revelation by giving in the prologue an overview of the themes that will be worked out in narrative form in the story."[74] In the exegesis of John 11 below, which encompasses the account of Lazarus, some of the same questions of why there should be pain and suffering come up.

As with Job, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus have friends (v. 31) who are supportive of them. In addition, as stated in *Inter Varsity Press New Testament Commentaries*, the three are beloved friends of Jesus. One day, Lazarus falls ill, and his sisters send a message to Jesus concerning Lazarus: "Lord, the one you love is sick" (v. 3-5).[75] Upon hearing this news, Jesus reassures his disciples gathered around him saying in verse 4, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that

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[73]Alissa Jones Nelson, "Justice and Biblical Interpretation beyond Subjectivity and Self-Determination: A Contrapuntal Reading on the Theme of Suffering in the Book of Job," *Political Theology* 11 (2010), 431-452.

[74]New *Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press).

[75]Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

God's Son may be glorified through it."[76] This shows that sometimes the mystery of grief is in the expression of God's glory.

According to *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, Martha and Mary were not specific about their request as far as asking Jesus to physically be present, perhaps because they knew that Jesus's life might have been in danger from other religious leaders who hated him. At the same time, it is clear they want his help whether Jesus would speak the word of healing from a distance or could be physically present.[77]

However, Jesus does not respond right away and comes after Lazarus has died. When they meet, Martha and Mary seem to be disappointed and angry about Jesus's timing. They question Jesus about why He delayed his response:[78] "Lord . . . if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21).[79] The love that Jesus has for these friends shows that faith in the love of God in times of trouble is solid.[80] Sometimes, God seems to be late after individual's request help, which can lead to disappointment and anger toward God.[81] Yet, as we see in the account of Lazarus, the delay of God is purposeful.[82]

In the story of Lazarus, Jesus is depicted as the "Savior, Healer, and Comforter"[83] to those grieving the illness and death of their loved one. Upon meeting one another, the

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[76]Ibid.

[77]Burge and Hill, 1138-42.

[78]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary On the Whole Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987).

[79] R. E. Production, ed., *Holy Bible--New International Version* (Dallas, TX: 2012).

[80]IVP.

[81]John McIndoe, "Lazarus, his Friend," *Expository Times* 116 (February 2005), 164-165.

[82]Henry.

[83]Ibid.

three friends are moved with emotion regarding Lazarus's death and weep together, as Jesus comforts Mary and Martha. However, Jesus is not only moved with emotion because Lazarus has died, but also because He is saddened that Martha and Mary do not realize Jesus is the resurrection and has the power to bring Lazarus back to life. Instead, they are resigned to reaping God's promises in eternity.[84] As Martha states in 11: 24, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus then asks to be shown the tomb where Lazarus is buried and commands, "Take away the stone" (11:39).[85]

> But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go.

In *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology,* Anne Robertson contends that like many well-meaning persons, Martha's response to Jesus may be expressing her faith; but at the same time, her words sound intellectual and not spiritual. She and Mary expect no extraordinary action from God presently, but only in the afterlife.[86] They are not fully cognizant of Jesus's power to do anything. In their eyes, their brother is dead, and they believe it is too late to perform any healing, much less resurrect him.

However, Jesus is in a position to do much more than Mary and Martha realize.

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[84]Ibid.

[85]NIV.

[86]Anne Robertson, "John 11:1-53," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 58 (April 2004), 175-177.

He is grieved by the loss of Lazarus and by Martha and Mary's lack of full understanding of the glory and mystery of God that He came to earth to manifest. Still, Jesus is able to not only offer the sister's comfort, but also perform the miracle of resurrection. Regardless of the other miracles performed by Jesus and despite not witnessing Him perform a eulogy; Martha, Mary, and their friends who witness Lazarus's resurrection are astonished.

In conclusion, the story of Lazarus in John 11, like the story of Job, has a dramatic ending.[87] Like Job in the Old Testament whose health, livelihood, and loved ones are restored, In the New Testament Jesus miraculously brings Lazarus back to life. Both Job's victorious restoration and Lazarus's resurrection show the Glory of God. Jesus demonstrates in John 11 that resurrection begins in this life and continues into the afterlife. He proves that not all of God's promises are delayed for eternity.[88] Both the story of Job and the story of Lazarus serve as foundational examples of human suffering and struggles with grief, illustrating how, in the end, God's promises are true.

Theological Foundations

There are many questions surrounding human grief, loss, and suffering such as "Where is God in relation to human suffering? How close is God to us in our suffering? And how close is our suffering to God?" Even to ask these questions is to step into a realm beyond human comprehension. Loss is a natural part of life; however, understanding and coping with human grief in response to loss is sometimes difficult for even the most skilled and adapted of persons. In addition, those who believe in God as

[87]Burge and Hill, 1138-42.

[88]Ibid.

loving, omnipresent, and omnipotent are met with a paradox when they experience senseless loss and suffering, and are forced to question God as being loving and benevolent. Grief is both a deeply personal and a universal experience.

In *Noah Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language,* theology is defined as "[t]he science of God or of religion; the science which treats of the existence, character, and attributes of God, his laws and government, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice; divinity as more commonly understood."[89] Thomas and Wondra in *Introduction to Theology* contend that for European and North American theologians, theology investigates and interprets Christian faith and is therefore understood as Christian theology.[90] That is, in the Western world, theology is an activity or function of the Christian Church carried out by its members.

Thomas and Wondra assert that many Christians have all but abandoned any teaching on loss, suffering, grief, or even eternity.[91] Christianity has taken on the philosophy of faith over matter, so that when someone is in pain or grieving, there is little comfort offered. The bereaved are expected to overcome their grief with their faith, and if they express any pain and suffering, they are left to feel they are lacking in faith.

Catholic priest and theologian Henri Nouwen[92] uses Carl Jung's[93] archetype of the wounded healer when he writes about ministers assisting the bereaved. In his book,

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[89]Noah Webster, *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language with Reference* History (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1943).

[90]Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 1-7.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Henri Josef Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday, 1994).

[93]Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society, he discusses how the image of the wounded healer conveys the dilemma of modern man. Nouwen believes that while we are wounded we can come to a place of healing where we can minister to others. He asserts it is important for ministers to be transparent and have a lucid heart, so that they can make their own heart a focal point of ministering to the wounded. Nouwen states that a minister desiring to be of service to others must have a "deeper understanding of the ways in which he or she can make his own wounds available as a source of healing."[94] He writes, "Whether he tries to enter into a dislocated world, relate to a convulsive generation, or speak to a dying man, [the minister's] service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which he speaks"[95] In this way, a minister's transparency can be effective in helping others transform their suffering into healing.

Writer, theologian, and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis discusses how grief and loss are ageless and leave one with theological questions and a challenged faith in God. In *The Problem of Pain,* Lewis writes about pain and suffering that human beings inflict upon one another:

> The possibility of pain is inherent in the very existence of a world where souls can meet. When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs, it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork.[96]

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[94]Ibid., 16-17.

[95]Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer,* 16.

[96]C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001), 86.

As Lewis states above, it is people, and not God, who hurt one another through their stupidity and greed. Often, however, God is blamed for not interceding and for not obstructing human will when there is suffering. Lewis adds "there remains, none the less, much suffering which cannot thus be traced to ourselves."[97]

Later in his life, when Lewis experienced the loss of his wife, he was forced to come to grips with emotional suffering on a personal level. While he was able to intellectually explain away human suffering before, losing his wife caused him to question and reevaluate his theology of suffering up to that point. Lewis states in his book, *A Grief Observed*, that he "expressed deep anger toward God, calling him a 'Cosmic Sadist,' an 'Eternal Vivisector,' and a 'very absent help in trouble'."[98]

Following his harrowing experience of losing his wife to cancer, Lewis made a distinction between the intellectual problem of evil and the emotional problem of evil. He explains that it is difficult for the mind and the heart to be in harmony when one is confronted by evil. In his case, the evil to which Lewis refers is cancer, which killed his wife. The writer of this study equates Lewis's account of his emotional response to evil with one's emotional response to loss and grief.

Some things are a mystery; God has made man and woman in God's image, yet humans have a will of choice, which resounds at times on their experience of pain or happiness. Thomas Aquinas, thirteenth-century Dominican priest, philosopher, and theologian, says, "We cannot know what God is but only what God is not."[99] Furthermore, Aquinas speaks on the human will clearly as actions done by man, which

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[97]Ibid.

[98]C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001), 101.

[99]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Salinas, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), 3.

are called human actions. He argues that some suffering comes from human actions as opposed to God's action. He argues that man is different from animals because unlike animals, man has the ability to reason, which makes him master of his actions.[100]

Aquinas attempts to answer the question, "Where is God in relation to human suffering?" He argues that humans do not have all of the answers because of God's intricacies and mysteries. The mystery is, while God is all-powerful and omnipresent, how can humans believe, when they are suffering, that he is not there? In attempting to explain God's mystery, Aquinas proposes what God is not: God is not divided into matter and form; does not lack anything; is not finite and limited; and is not changeable in God's essence.

In addition, Aquinas states that God is also not apart from human suffering; he is *within* human pain and suffering. Not only do humans suffer, but God suffers with them. The world is all about redemption and deliverance from suffering, and human suffering and pain is not unfelt by God, however difficult that may be for the human mind and heart to grasp. Aquinas sees humans' suffering as being not isolated from that of God's.[101] Therefore, human beings must appreciate the honor bestowed upon them when they suffer, and view it as a sacred duty, because they are being asked to share in, and alleviate, God's suffering.

Tyrone Inbody, a theologian, writer, and professor, contends in his book, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil,* that Christian theology holds the view that while experiencing senseless suffering, one can simultaneously believe

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[100]Ibid., 1-70.

[101]Ibid.

"God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent," and that evil is real.[102] Inbody acknowledges that Christians continue to believe in God because of Theodicy, which is "an attempt to reconcile belief in the goodness and power of God with the fact of evil in the world."[103] Thus, Inbody explains, God is seen as a God of mercy and justice. Even though pain and suffering seem senseless, God is in human suffering and does not desert people as their finite mind does. God does not forsake people in their times of trouble, but is involved and feels the pain of those suffering.[104] Inbody contends that God is a relational God, who is not absent in human suffering, but present. He explains that God is not an outsider watching the sufferers' pain, but a God of compassion, and love, ever transforming, re-creating, and reshaping humans' understanding of divine power.[105]

Paul Tillich, a German-American theologian, existential philosopher, professor, and writer, discusses in his book, *The Courage to Be*,[106] how it does not take courage or much faith to believe in God when all is going well, and one is prospering. However, Tillich goes on to explain that it takes "enormous courage, the courage of confidence in more than the sovereignty of fact and appearance," to believe in God when faced with hatred, evil, death, and the dark of night. It takes a lot of courage to believe that God is on one's side, when one is suffering and losing. As Tillich puts it, "This is the echo of

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[102]Tyron Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 27.

[103]Ibid., 27-28.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid., 177.

[106] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 168.

Job, who, in the midst of his dung hill and despair, gives in to neither and proclaims, 'Though He slay me, yet will I praise Him'."[107]

Like Tillich, Inbody believes in the two primary Western thoughts about human suffering: stoic courage and Christian courage. Stoicism accepts fate and suffering as divine duty, while "Christian courage rests on the faith of the resurrection, re-creation and transformation."[108] Thus, the "Christian vision of the world offers finally the reality of grace in the midst of suffering"[109]

Many theologians and writers have also touched on the effective role of pastoral care in the grieving process among local congregants. Below are discussed the perspectives of, and questions embraced by, some African American theologians who articulated the particular spiritual journey that African Americans share through suffering. In *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide*, John Patton[110] discusses the important role of religious leaders. He addresses those who care for others at the time of their bereavement and grief and asks:

> Where can wisdom be found to deal with the human lostness that calls for pastoral care? Human beings can know and discover so many things in the world, but the wisdom to deal with the practical and painful situations in their own lives and in the lives of others involves a never-ending search.[111]

Patton wants religious leaders to be aware of the pastoral care of those who are wounded so that they can help in the process of transformation on behalf of both the

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[107]Ibid.

[108]Inbody, 178.

[109]Ibid.

[110]John Patton, *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 139-140, Kindle Edition.

[111]Ibid.

healer and the wounded. He believes spiritual leaders must use their listening skills and make sure they are not giving mere intellectual clichés for advice. Thus they can assist the grievers in working through their pain without inflicting further pain by counseling them with empty words.[112]

African American writer, professor, minister, and theologian Renita Weems also speaks of the pain and suffering particular to African American women. In her book, *Listening For God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt*,[113] she describes African American women's historical and racial heritage, coupled with their gender, which in and of themselves are painful, and which render their pain more complex. Weems further discusses how there are seasons of the soul, just as there are seasons of the year. As the soul's experience unfolds, one may not be aware or understand the mysteries one encounters. This often leaves the griever with some age-old questions for God, such as "Why is this happening? and Where is God?"[114]

Weems believes that as the pain is in process, one may be reluctant to embrace the new experiences one encounters because of grief, which are inevitable on the spiritual journey of curves and slumps. Sometimes effective previous lessons are forgotten, leaving one vulnerable to succumb to the grief. Weems recommends accepting one's painful journey with support from others and making use of lessons and skills learned in previous painful situations. She acknowledges a griever's temptation to doubt God's presence and care. Speaking from her own personal experience as an African American

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[112]Ibid.

[113]Renita J. Weems, *Listening For God: A Ministers Journey Through Silence And Doubt* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2000).

[114]Ibid.

female minister, she suggests this is where a minister can intercede with prayer, counsel, and silent support. Weems places great emphasis on the power of being a silent listener and allowing the griever to work through the process of grief, without pre-packaged answers that close down any discussion rather than allowing the healing to take its natural course.[115]

Weems particularly addresses the position of female ministers in the Black Church. She explains how women are often not respected as leaders by both male and female congregants in the Black Church due to their patriarchal view of Christian teachings and Scripture. She counteracts this controversy scripturally by giving examples of powerful women in the Old Testament, such as Naomi and Ruth, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, respectively, which held pivotal positions in scripture. Naomi was instrumental in her kinsman Boaz marrying Ruth, which made it possible to continue the lineage of Jesus. Another example is Queen Esther who was a leader in the deliverance of her people, the Israelites, from their bondage into freedom.[116]

Weems points out that African American women must be leaders because they have special skills as females in addition to their racial memory that make them instrumental in relieving the pain of others. They deserve to enjoy the same expression of faith in front of a congregation, as do the male ministers. Weems concludes that leaders in the Black Church must not suppress African American female ministers because of their gender, as they hold answers for how people can be transformed from being pained and wounded to being healed and whole.[117]

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[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid.

[117]Ibid.

Similarly, African American writer, professor, minister, and theologian Delores S. Williams writes how the Book of Exodus reflects a theology of the oppressed, as it tells the story of those who suffer at the hands of other humans. In her book, *Sisters in the Wilderness*,[118] Williams discusses how, enslaved and oppressed by the Egyptians for 400 years, the Israelites rely on God's provision of sustenance. She discusses the Israelites' flight from Egypt led by Moses and their journey through the wilderness before they settle in the Promised Land. Throughout their journey and exodus from the wilderness, the Israelites are sustained by the promise and fulfillment of living a life of freedom, as God has promised them.[119]

Williams points out the questions of why the Israelites are suffering and whether God provides for the Israelites or the Ishmaelites. She explains the answer is that God will provide for all of the people and not only for some, because God is a God of unity who has placed all nations together on one earth to perform God's will of peace and harmony as opposed to pain and division. Williams further explains it is through the leadership of Moses that the Israelites can be delivered from bondage. The Exodus stresses the importance and necessity of holding onto one's faith in the midst of pain and suffering, in order to achieve deliverance.[120]

Williams likens the story of the Israelites to the plight of African Americans in slavery and beyond, and to the plight of women in particular. She discusses the Israelites' journey through oppression and survival in the wilderness and explains that God's will

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[118]Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

[119]Ibid.

[120]Ibid.

for human survival and community building reflects the Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven. Williams uses the Israelites' example of fortitude and faith in the wilderness to prove God's promise that all will eventually be well. She, like Weems, explains that in addition to the fight to be racially free, African American women continue to fight to have a voice as women in general, and as female ministers in the Black Church, in particular.[121]

According to Williams, African American women deal with the theology of grief and pain, not based on the intellect, but relying on the love and support of their loved ones surrounding them and on their interactions with the Spirit of God. Thus, their healing from grief and pain is a true reflection of the great respect they always show for the Presence and Work of the Spirit. [122]

Williams observes that the African American theological approach to loss and grief is often judged not by the efficiency and ritualism of the worship service, or by the scholarly content of the sermon. African American grievers prefer to be participants in their own healing process as opposed to merely receiving an intellectual sermon. Therefore, in the theological approach in the Black Church, the relief of pain depends on the transformation of the spiritually vibrant worship through prayer, rhythmic sermons, and syncopated music which minister to and deals with the pain of the African American griever.[123]

Martin Luther King, African American theologian, writer, minister, social and spiritual transformer, and Civil Rights activist, discusses the theological question of Why

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[121]Williams.

[122]Ibid.

[123]Ibid.

God allows evil. He contends that while there is evil and good in the world, there are solutions that Christians must exhibit, because Jesus is the example. He believes that social injustices should be met with a Christianity that allows one to live the biblical principles and teachings of love, while facing the adversity of love and freedom. [124]

In *A Testament of Hope,* [125] King speaks of two ways that African Americans can respond to what he calls unearned or unmerited suffering, that is, the suffering of the innocent who have done nothing to bring suffering upon themselves. Of the two ways, either reacting with bitterness or with creative transformation, King advocates the latter. As he states,

> Recognizing the necessity for suffering, I have tried to make of it virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation, which now obtains.[126]

King also discusses how sometimes, there are no adequate words to erase irreversible grief, pain, and suffering, and he suggests the best would be to comfort the grieving soul in silence and love, which he calls the "language of the heart." He states, "Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. Their meanings can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart."[127]

The comfort that King offers with the language of the heart and the profound ministry of silence often makes supporters, loved ones, and even the

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[124]Martin Luther King Jr, *The Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

[125]Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1991).

[126]Ibid.

[127]King Jr., *Strength to Love*.

griever uncomfortable.[128] This kind of ministry is in contrast to the philosophy of faith over matter that has become so popular in Christian Churches, which expects the bereaved to overcome their grief with their faith.[129] Most people, including ministers, are so conditioned to speak and express themselves with words, that they feel the urge to fill the emptiness grief brings, with words. However, they do not always have the words to heal, or to speed the process of healing. Rather, the healing must be left to the pace of the griever and God.

[128]Ibid.

[129]Thomas and Wondra, Introduction to Theology, 3rd ed., 1-7.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

To explore the impact of direct pastoral involvement and identify helpful grief strategies, the writer organized and implemented a small grief support group retreat. This chapter presents the methodology used from the beginning to the end of the field study experience. It discusses the setting, study design, data collection, participants, procedure, measurement, and data analysis.

Setting

The grief support group retreat was held at the Martin De Porres Center on the campus of Ohio Dominican University at 2330 Airport Drive in Columbus, Ohio (Schedule, Appendix A and Directions, Appendix B). This retreat center was intentionally selected outside the Jerusalem Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church for privacy and concentration purposes, as the location allowed little to no interruptions from any familiar surroundings. The support group was held on Saturday October 13, 2012. A Continental breakfast, lunch, and snacks were served. The group consisted of five African-American congregants and three professionally trained grief pastoral care counselors who facilitated the meetings and discussions.

Study Design

This study used a mixed-design methodology, relying on quantitative (pre- and post- self-administered tests) and qualitative (initial reflexive journals, support group discussions, storytelling, participant observation, field notes, and follow-up reflexive journals) methods. Since "[c]ases are bounded by time and activity, and writers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time,"[1] the writer used the multiple case narrative method as well as surveys. The writer decided that using mostly qualitative methods was well suited for obtaining her objective, given the personal and emotional nature of the data she collected. The multiple case narrative method allowed the writer to appreciate, and capture the uniqueness of, the reality of experience of each individual case.[2]

Due to the small sample size, it is not possible to make assumptions about the distribution of scores that would be necessary in order to use parametric statistics to evaluate the null hypothesis in this study. Therefore the investigator had to rely on a non-parametric test.[3] The Wilcoxin signed rank test was selected, because it is analogous to the one sample t-test and can be used to assess the probability that the different between pre- and post-tests is greater than zero.

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[1]Asher Shekedi, *Multiple Case Narrative: A Qualitative Approach to Studying Multiple Populations* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins (2005), 13.

[2]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009).

[3]Sidney Siegel & N. John Castellan. *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences,* end ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1988).

Data Collection

The writer used the multiple case narrative methods to collect data from each of the five participants. Through reflexive journals (Appendix C), follow-up reflexive journals (Appendix G), support group discussions (Appendix F), and storytelling, the participants revealed their experiences and realities regarding their particular grief and loss. The writer also collected data through participant observation and field notes.

Finally, the writer collected quantitative data through pre and post-tests which were self-administered. The questions in the pre and post-tests asked about the participants' knowledge and coping strategies. For instance, some of the knowledge questions were constructed to ask the participants about each of Kubler-Ross's stages of grief, such as "Are you familiar with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief? and "Can you identify the stages of grief?" Some of the questions on coping strategies were constructed to ask the participants about their skills at coping with their grief and loss, such as "Have you ever joined a formal grief support group like this one? Do you benefit from (listening or singing) songs of comfort to ease your pain? Have you lamented (told your story to someone)? and Have you journaled (written down your story)?"

Participants

The writer individually invited twelve congregants (six males and six females) at JTMBC who have been going through grieving a loss, to volunteer in her project. Although they all agreed, none of the men showed up for one reason or another. One man had to work, one had just lost a sister, one explained that it

would be too much grief release and therefore he changed his mind, one called saying he was sick, one man decided he was not going to participate, and did not give a reason why, and one never got back to the writer. It may have been that the men were leery of opening up about their inner feelings. This is in accordance with research of African American men.[4] African Americans' common history of living under the shadow of the ideology of white supremacy and Black inferiority has given them a unique disposition. It has made them mistrustful of outside, professional help and of support groups.[5]

Only five female congregants actually participated in the study. Of the women who had agreed to participate, one woman who did not attend told the writer later that she forgot; the other five women were present for the retreat. A sixth female participated in the retreat, having decided to attend that morning, although she had not kept an initial reflexive journal. She also did not take the pre- and post-tests, but participated in all of the discussions and provided a follow-up reflexive journal.

Procedure

The grief retreat took place on Saturday, October 13th, 2012 at the Martin De Porres Center at Ohio Dominican University, 2330 Airport Drive in Columbus, Ohio (Schedule, Appendix A and Directions, Appendix B). The writer

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[4]Ana Liberato, Dana Fennell, and William Jeffries, "I Still Remember America: Senior African Americans Talk About Segregation," *Journal Of African American Studies* 12 (2008), 229-242. Musa, Donald; Schulz, Richard; Harris, Roderick; Silverman, Myrna; Thomas, Stephen B. "Trust in the Health Care System and the Use of Preventive Health Services by Older Black and White Adults," *American Journal of Public Health* 99 (July 2009), 1293-1299.

[5]Ibid.

emailed directions to each participant for how to get to the location of the retreat. In her email, she also restated the purpose of the event.

The grief retreat began at 9:00 A.M. and ended at 2:30 P.M. When the guests arrived, they signed a covenant agreement stating that everything discussed during the retreat would remain confidential (Appendix D). They also signed a video release agreement (Appendix E) for this project, stating they agreed for the writer to videotape the meeting and they understood that the writer would use the videotape for educational purposes only. After the participants had signed the release forms and agreements, they had a Continental breakfast. The writer had a compact disk (CD) of hymns playing in the background while the participants ate in fellowship.

Everyone was seated around the table having a Continental breakfast together in a small conference room that was meant to seat fifteen-twenty people. The grief retreat began with prayer, which the writer led, asking the Lord to bless the endeavor the group was about to embark on. Next, the writer introduced herself and the purpose of the retreat and explained the schedule for the day. She then introduced her professional associate and her peer associate and explained their role in the grief retreat. Her associates each shared their daily responsibilities as a Chaplain serving those in grief and discussed their role in the healing process of grief.

The writer then asked the participants to introduce themselves to the group, and each person gave her name, talked about why she was there, and whom she was grieving. In addition to the five female participants described in

the above section, others who attended the event included two female guest speakers who were long-term grief support group leaders from a local church. They explained that they came to talk about the weekly grief support group for the community at large that they lead at a local African American Baptist church. The writer had attended their grief support group.

There was also a female worship leader from a different church, who led worship as well as played the piano and sang hymns. In addition, one of the writer's peers in the Pastoral Care program, who is a Hospital Chaplain, attended to help the writer facilitate the retreat; and one of the writer's professional associates, who is a Hospice Chaplain and Pastor, contributed to her PowerPoint presentation and helped to facilitate one of the two small group discussions and storytelling meetings. There were also a masseuse and three technical support assistants for computer issues, videotaping, and recording the conversations. The pleasant breakfast time set the tone for the morning.

At 9:30 A.M., the writer began the didactic by giving a PowerPoint presentation, "Dealing with Grief in the Black Church, Community and Family." She first told the group the purpose of her conducting this grief support group. She gave a summary on the historical impact of African-American grief. She summarized the theological foundations of the grief question, "Where is God?" The writer discussed theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's notion of suffering and

cheap grace.[6] She then discussed theologian James Cone's Black Theology[7] in which he speaks of the God of the Oppressed.[8] Next, she talked about Lewter-Cooper's Soul Theology.[9] She also gave a biblical account of grief, touching on the Book of Job and the story of Lazarus.

Then the writer gave a synopsis of grief strategies. The writer's peer associate in the pastoral care program completed the PowerPoint presentation by talking about Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief.[10] The half hour was meant to be time set aside for the presentation, but because of the nature of grief, the writer understood that grief had to take its course for the process of healing to take place. So she did not interfere with this grieving process. At the completion of the presentation there was a brief altercation over Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief that was resolved. The writer then announced the next activity on the agenda, which was for each participant to share and lament her story of loss and grief.

The writer told the group about the power of telling one's story to others. She explained that lamenting gives freedom and sometimes can help a person get unstuck in the grieving process. She hesitantly read her own story of many losses in front of the whole group, as a model for the participants to tell their own

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[6]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995).

[7]James Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation* – 40th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

[8]James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

[9]Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (Charlottesville, VA: Harriet Tubman Press, 1999).

[10]Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2007).

stories. The writer's present widowhood of grief made it difficult to get through the reading of her story of loss and grief. She tearfully completed her story, which took about fifteen minutes. The writer then invited the participants to break into two small groups of three, which met in different rooms. The writer's peer, and her associate led the two groups. In the small groups, all of the participants had a chance to talk and tell the stories that they had written in their initial reflexive journals. They spoke from their pain and shared their loss and grief. They told the group what they were grieving, and whether their grief stemmed from a present, or an older, unresolved loss. Both groups took about forty-five minutes to one hour to complete their sharing and lamenting.

During lunch, there was also another activity going on. The writer had invited a massage therapist to be present and to offer neck and shoulder massages to any of the participants who wanted one. This was one of the strategies that the writer had talked about for grief stress relief. The massage therapist did not only provide a fifteen-minute massage, but she also offered prayer and words of encouragement during the massage.

Another grief strategy that was used was humor. During lunch break, everyone watched a fifteen-minute clip of the comedian Sinbad. The jokes were about relationships and the economy. There was a long monologue about the Internal Revenue Service and that it was the reason Sinbad had been unavailable to his audience recently. This is also why he said he had to dismiss the band halfway through the song, as he had financial problems. The group had a very

positive reaction to watching the video, which seemed to bring a sense of release and relaxation.

After lunch, two grief support group facilitators spoke to the group about a thirteen-week grief support group that meets weekly at a local church. The writer herself was currently attending the support group that these facilitators were conducting, and she found the group to be beneficial. She wanted to have the facilitators speak to the group, in case any of the participants in her group wanted an extended grief support experience beyond the one-day grief retreat she was offering. The speakers handed out a brochure about their support group and encouraged participants in the group to join.

In the afternoon, the group had a whole-group discussion about some of the questions the writer had prepared and had handed out to the participants (Appendix F). The writer acknowledged that members in the group may be at a different stage of grief and they can help each other. The group then started the discussion, which took thirty minutes. The discussion was followed by a didactic on grief strategies, both positive and negative. Before the event concluded, there was singing with piano accompaniment and worship.

The participants then paired with one another and prayed. They traded partners until everyone had prayed for everyone else. Thus, each participant was able to receive prayers and words of encouragement. At the completion of the prayer session, the participants expressed contentment, relief, and gratitude for the blessings they received. As the grief support group retreat concluded, the writer requested that the participants keep a follow-up reflexive journal in which they commented on their responses to the

retreat. She handed out questions (Appendix G) for them to respond to. The retreat concluded with the benediction led by the writer.

Measurement and Data Analysis

The pre and post- self-administered tests measured the state of each individual before versus after the support group. The pre-test established where the individuals were at the start of the support group. The post-test, administered at the completion of the support group, evaluated the effectiveness of the support group and the tools presented. The pre and post-self-administered tests provided quantitative data.

Qualitative data was gathered from the reflexive journals and group discussions which the writer also analyzed. In addition, the writer analyzed the participants' follow-up reflexive journals (Appendix G) that each participant wrote.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This chapter provides a holistic view of the field study experience and describes the sequence of activities that constituted the field experience. It reports on a culmination of data extrapolated from journals, the grief support group retreat, pre- and post-tests, and personal interviews. The field study was conducted on Saturday, October 13th, 2012 at the Martin De Porres Center in Columbus, Ohio. Prior to the retreat, the participants were asked to keep a three-week journal in which they responded to grief-focused questions. A pre-test was conducted before the retreat. In-depth personal interviews and a post-test were conducted two weeks after the completion of the retreat. In the following sections, the results of the journals are presented, followed by the results of the grief support group retreat, the results of the pre- and post-test, and the results of personal interviews.

Results of the Initial Reflexive Journals

Blank journal notebooks were handed out to each participant two weeks prior to the grief retreat support group meeting. The participants were instructed to keep a journal for a week. Each day, they were to choose one question regarding grief and loss from the questions given to them, and write about it (Appendix C). The questions asked about the source of their pain, about their most painful loss, about any unresolved issues they had with their grief, different

strategies they tried to deal with their grief, writing a letter to the person they lost, and the best and worst advice people had given to them in their time of loss. Two weeks after the support group met, the journals were collected.

The first question asked the following: "What is the source of your pain that brought you to this support group? Whom or what did you lose to cause your current grief? How long ago was your loss? What was your first reaction after the news of your loss? What did you do? Are you having trouble accepting your loss?" One participant wrote in her journal that her most recent loss was the loss of her father/best friend less than six months ago. Her first reaction was disbelief. When the news of her father's death sank in, she said she wished she would leave the earth immediately even though she had children to care for, so that she could be with her parents. While both her parents were gone and she felt cheated by God, she thought it would not be fair to leave her children motherless. The second participant wrote that she lost her dad at the age of ninety-two. He lost control of his automobile and ended in the hospital. He had injured his esophagus and was unable to swallow. Like the previous writer, she felt she lost her best friend. She was left with her mother who has dementia, which is another grief that she is presently dealing with.

The third participant wrote about recently losing her brother in law. Her first reaction to the terrible news she received was she did not believe it was true. She did not believe it lined up with God's plan. She felt frozen in her step. She told God something was not right and began to cry. She kept praying and asking God for information on his timing of the death, the interruption of life. This writer

echoed the first writer when she said, "I don't really know how to deal with death. It seems to me like God spoke and said, 'THE END.' I think, 'Now, what can I do with that?'" She concluded that she has to go on as best as she can, "with or without clarification from God. He is God, and He had His plans long before I came along."

The fourth participant wrote in her journal she is suffering from the loss of her first child who was born three months premature six years ago. The date of the retreat happened to coincide with her child's birth and death, which is why she wrote, "This time of year tends to be very weird for me." She says she relives a lot of the events leading up to the birth and death of her child. While she continues morn, she says she has accepted her loss. She also mentions that when the participant was thirteen, she lost her oldest sister tragically. She is currently grieving the unexpected loss of her father in law who passed away a few months ago. She writes she is still processing this loss and she does not have words to describe it.

The second question was the following: "What was your most painful loss? Have you experienced deep grieving? How? Please describe what grief felt like for you. Discuss the feeling(s) you experienced the most strongly." The first speaker expressed regret and anger. She regretted not having had the chance to say "I love you" to her father one last time and to hold his hand while he took his last breath, and she was angry that she no longer had her father to guide her. There were many days she could not get out of bed because of her grief. The second participant wrote in her journal that her most painful loss was losing her

grandson who was murdered during a drug deal. She blamed herself for not being stricter with him and for putting him out of her home because he showed disrespect to her husband. The third participant wrote her most painful loss was losing her mother. She and her mother used to talk, laugh, and have fun together. She appreciated being herself around her mother. She was five months pregnant at the time she got the news of her mother's passing from her sister, an hour after she left the hospital. She felt God had mercy on her by not having her mother take her last breath while she was there. She wrote that she felt lost.

The fourth participant said she might not have gone through the proper steps of bereavement, but that losing her first born was her lowest point ever in her life. She felt "sick, empty, out of place, sorrowful, confused, angry with [herself] and others, doubtful and sad." At the same time, she resonates that she was never alone. Even though she was low, she says "something in the back of my mind told me the entire time that I was going to be ok, that I *was* okay." She was later also comforted and felt blessed by having two other children.

The fifth participant wrote that she lost her parents and her most recent loss was her brother's passing six months ago. She says she is experiencing some unresolved grief and is still going through the grieving process. As she put it, her heart was broken when she got news that her brother had just passed. Her first reaction was shock. She immediately went to his home where he had passed away. Her loss has left her feeling empty. She finds it very difficult to be around people and wants to escape through sleep for long periods of time so she would not have to think about her grief, but she writes that she can't sleep very well.

Even though her first intense loss was more than twenty-five years ago, each loss since then has awakened and intensified her earlier grief. Even though each death has been approximately ten years apart, she still finds it difficult to reconcile with death as a part of life. For her, grief is more intense some days than others.

The third journal question asked the participants to discuss any unresolved grief they may have. The first participant wrote about her unresolved grief over her mother's passing twenty-three years ago, which was awakened recently with her father's passing. She wrote, "Sometimes I wonder if my emptiness comes from not having my mother, although I had the best father ever to love me and my brothers. I don't know when or if my grieving will ever end. Losing my father now has been a complete devastation to my life and my children's lives."

The second participant mentioned she has unresolved grief over her grandson's death four years ago. She has not been able to overcome this loss and blames herself for the circumstances surrounding her grandson's death due to a shooting during a drug deal. In her journal she questioned the duration of her grieving. She believes it has taken her long to move through the grieving process because she holds herself responsible for his death. She believes she should have been stricter with him. In a letter she wrote to her grandson in her journal she gives examples of how she was not firm with him. She let her grandson convince her he was not using drugs so she agreed he did not need to be tested for drugs although the judge ordered a drug test. She also agreed that he did not need anger management, even at the request of the judge and Children's Services. Now she regrets her decisions because she believes these actions may have saved her

grandson's life. She feels that she cannot get past her grandson's death because of these decisions that she and her grandson made together.

With regard to unresolved grief, the third participant wrote in her journal that she does not believe she has unresolved grief. She refers to her losses as abrupt interruptions of life. This participant made a list of these interruptions in her life. The list includes the death of her two-month-old nephew, an elderly church member she cared for during her middle school years, her fifteen-year-old sister, an abortion when she was twenty-one, the death of her father at seventy-five years of age, a missing brother for sixteen years, only to find out he had been murdered fifteen years earlier, the death of her mother at seventy-two years of age, the death of her brother who was sixty-one years old, the death of her good friend of twenty-two years, her divorce eight years ago, and the deaths of two brother in laws, forty-seven and sixty years old, over the past summer. She says she accepted the major interruptions of these deaths in each case and turned to God every time for support and answers. She believes that God knows best and therefore she surrenders to the grieving process literally, day by day.

The fourth participant mentions the loss of her father in law as an unresolved grief. She grieves the fact that she had not realized how much she loved him, even though she had known and interacted with him for nineteen years during which time he played an integral role in her life. She shares the pain of her husband who was close to his father, and she can't imagine the extreme void that he must feel. She says she also has to deal with the questions from her children who loved and adored their grandfather tremendously and want to know where he

is. She says, "They miss him a lot, we all do," and she is searching for effective answers to give her children.

The participants were also prompted to discuss any strategies they used to deal with their grief. One participant wrote about using alcohol to mask the hurt because she did not want to deal with it. This was the same participant who wrote about having unresolved grief and feeling stuck in her pain. While she knows that alcohol was not a healthy strategy, it eased her pain for the time being. She wrote she sometimes turns to prayer as well, but she admits she needed alcohol for immediate relief. Another participant wrote that she became very busy to distract herself from grieving. Therefore, she diverted the grief by getting involved in church activities. She also used the strategy of meditation and solitude. When her dad passed away at ninety-two years of age, she rode around town thinking about her father and what he was like throughout her life. She asked herself, "What is it going to be like to drive around town without my dad?" She also used prayer. She said, "Only God can fill the void and I thank God for giving me a dad like you. You taught me so much, like patience, kindness, hardworking, and I thank God for all you did." Other strategies used to deal with grief included overeating, painting, and lamenting. The fourth participant who continued to grieve for her deceased first born decided to deal with her grief by giving her second son a name that combines her deceased son's first and middle names. This was one strategy she used to keep her deceased son's memory alive. The fifth participant wrote that one of her strategies is to isolate herself from people, except for speaking to her brother's widow, which comforts her. She also uses sleep aids, prayer, and

meditation, and listens to music that she likes. One song in particular that she likes to listen to, is a song by Lionel Richie, called Jesus is Love.

Another prompt in the journal was to "share images or thoughts of your loved one after he or she passed away that really bothered you." A disturbing image one participant has of her father is that he died alone. She also wrote that she was disappointed that her mother and father who have passed away do not come to her in her dreams. She would like to be reassured that they are still with her. She believes the only way she can stay connected with her parents is in her dreams. She wrote, "Sometimes I wonder why they don't come. I get angry sometimes 'cause I have heard of others who have dreams of my parents and I wonder why they don't comfort me or give me reassurance that everything will be ok."

The second participant cannot get rid of the image of her grandson getting shot. She wishes she could have changed the course of his life. In a letter she wrote to her grandson she tells him, "Your life was so short. I got cheated. You were cheated." The third participant carries with her the question, "What would their lives be like if they could have lived in a well body?" Since they each had a health problem, she cannot wish them to have remained alive. One image that continues to bother her is her brother being shot to death. Since she does not have any details of his death, she can only imagine the violence that surrounded his death. She has a lot of unanswered questions. Therefore she finds it difficult to make peace with her brother's passing at the young age of twenty-four. The fourth participant writes that she thinks daily about her first-born child who died

prematurely. She says, "Some memorable images are so vivid, while some details are fading." She wonders and imagines what life would be like if he was here.

The fifth participant also wrote a letter to her brother who passed away recently. In it, she tells him she knows he is with the Lord and with his parents by his side. She says she needs a little more time and promises him she "will not stay in the grief mode forever and will soon bounce back." She confides in her brother that another source of pain for her is the continuing distance of her two remaining siblings. Even prior to her brother's death, although she used to try to invite them to occasions at her home, they would not participate. She thought this behavior might change with their brother's passing, but she has not seen or heard from them except immediately after the funeral. This leaves her feeling alone and lonely with images of her time with her deceased brother. She concludes her letter saying, "Even though you are not here physically, it's just you and me, like always. I love you."

In response to being asked to name the best or worst grief relief words of encouragement one participant wrote, "Most things you can hear or not hear at such an unreal time/zone." She herself has said to others, "May the peace of God that transcends all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus and May you feel comfort of the Holy Spirit." Among the best actions of others that she reported having helped her with her grief was church members and neighbors bringing food and having a prayer partner. She wrote that she sits with someone grieving or helps them with cleaning the house. Another participant reported that the worst thing anyone said or did upon the loss of her grandson was to relate to

her a dream they had in detail of how her grandson was shot. It was horrible to hear, and she begged the person not to repeat that dream to her daughter, the mom of her grandson.

The last participant wrote that some of the best words someone told her were that it takes time to grieve, and to do something that she likes to do, which for her, is dancing. The best action she believes she has taken was to participate in this grief support group. Also, a member at her church gave her a book on grieving, and always gives her a hug when she sees her, which she appreciates. The worst action that someone who was supposed to be her friend did toward her was to be more concerned about her brother's vehicle and less concerned about how she was dealing with his death. This person had stayed away for days and did not even check on her to see how she is doing.

In Question #7, the participants were asked to write about their understanding of grief. The first participant appears not to understand the grieving process. She has attempted therapy but she did not find any relief from it, although it was good to talk. She seems to still experience a lot of anger, disappointment, anxiety, and depression and she would like instruction on how to fix herself. She has decided that she "may benefit from a Christian-based therapist to guide her through and find the answers that God may be trying to reveal to her." The second participant understands that her grief has remained unresolved for a long time. She found this support group helpful and has realized that she needs an ongoing grief support group to help her move through the grieving process.

The third participant wrote that so far, her understanding of grief is that "it feels lonely, bad, heavy, lost, and in your face without a pass or way out." She has come to understand that she has to go through it as best as she knows how, while leaning on God and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. She believes that eventually comfort comes, and better times come and go. She knows that as time goes on another relative or a friend will pass away, causing her to "run to God faster and faster." This participant recognizes that we also have mini losses that hurt us just as badly as major losses. For instance, her family moving when she was in second grade meant she had to attend a new school and make new friends. That same year she also had to start wearing eyeglasses. She concludes that grief, in her opinion, is an interruption and a troublemaker.

In response to the questions about her understanding of grief, the fourth participant wrote that she realized at some point, that she must encourage herself. As she began to heal following the death of her baby, she consoled herself saying that everything happens for a reason and found comfort in that thought. In other words, she came to accept loss as an inevitable part of life. This belief allowed her to accept her loss. As she writes, "We don't have to know what the reason is, but our duty is to learn from the experiences that God allows us to go through." Her experience with grief showed her that what carried her forward was her relationship with God that was already in place. Today, she relies on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to find her way, which helps her feel she is always going to be okay. The fifth participant wrote that her understanding of grief is that it is okay

to grieve, it takes time to heal, and at the same time, it is important to exhaust all your resources to help through the grieving process.

In conclusion, two out of the five participants were more willing to express their pain and exhaust an answer to each question. They appeared to have set aside time to diligently journal, and were more candid. On the other hand, three of the participants were either unable or unmotivated to answer the journal questions in full, because it hurt them to write about their present grief, which triggered older grief. They seemed to have rushed through the questions and wrote as a chore rather than embracing the process as a positive coping strategy. The writer did not press them to write more in their journal, because some of them expressed the difficulty they were having with their daily struggles and with moving through the grieving process. They told her that keeping a journal did not help to relieve their pain, but awakened it. This is where the other sources of data are useful, one of which is the discussion that took place during the grief support group retreat.

Results of the Grief Support Group Retreat

During the presentation that the writer's peer associate gave on Kubler Ross's five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance; there appeared to be a misunderstanding about what the speaker presented and how one of the participants interpreted what she said. The participant challenged the peer associate stating she did not agree with the way the speaker interpreted the stage of acceptance. She did not believe that her own inability to accept the loss of her mother reflected a lack of faith on her part. While she was speaking, she began to weep. She said she disagreed with the explanation

of the bargaining stage. The participant argued that her mother would not have died if she had a chance to bargain with God because her mother was such a good person.

One participant joined in the conversation and tried to explain specifics about this participant's grief because she knew her personally. She shared with the group that the participant had also lost her father recently. She therefore had insight into the participant's life. She could feel her pain more intimately and tried to comfort her. As the participant became emotionally agitated, the presentation turned into a discussion between three people. The professional associate joined the discussion, as well. He brought balance to the conversation by bringing up the theology that people who are going to die have a sense of death nearing. This seemed to bring some comfort to the participant and brought some clarity to the subject. Another participant remarked on the benefit of knowing the stages of grief. She said, "Its good to know the process that I experience through my grieving and that I can identify what's happening to me in the different stages."

In the afternoon the participants engaged in a group discussion, following a list of questions that the writer provided (Appendix F). The first question asked them to name a positive action that they took to take care of themselves in their time of grief. Five participants contributed by sharing a positive action they took. These included going to confession to relieve her guilt and pain, traveling and seeing God in a lot of different ways in different cultures and people, teaching and passing on to young people how they can escape the perils of the streets on which her grandson was murdered, being able to pray and speak about her pain directly to God, starting to say I love you to people while

they are still alive, focusing on what's good rather than on tragedies, and reading and listening to other people who have gone through similar pain to get answers.

The first speaker revealed her thirty-four-year secret of having aborted her fourth child. As a positive action that she took, she shared with the group her milestone of going to a Catholic priest for confession two years ago. Although she is a Protestant, she found comfort in releasing her guilt and secret in the safety of the confessional. She was able to share her newfound revelation in her academic studies that we need to acknowledge Jesus as the product of an unwed mother rather than only as Holy and lofty. As she said, her professor told her class, "Until we've seen Jesus as a child who grew up with a stepfather, we haven't seen Jesus. And until we see Jesus as an embryo, we haven't seen Jesus." At that revelation she said she burst into heavy deep crying. Telling her story to our support group was groundbreaking for this participant. Doing so seemed to bring some freedom to her with regard to the abortion she had. She felt the power of being able to acknowledge the abortion to the Catholic priest two years ago and to my support group during our retreat. She concluded by saying, "I do know that Jesus has forgiven me."

The second speaker said that the positive action she took to relieve her pain was to travel to Hawaii upon the admonition of a friend. She said, "It's one of the most beautiful places that I ever visited in my life. I had a lot of time to see God in a lot of different ways, different people, and different cultures. Traveling became an educator for me, it became a comfort." She said she also traveled in ministry, which gave her a newfound freedom. As she said, "When I traveled in ministry, I was not in a box. I crossed cultural lines and racial lines. I was able to give a piece of my bandage to

someone else. Because I believe the Bible says He sent His word to heal us." She concluded by sharing from the scripture, "they were healed as they went."

The third speaker said she lost her grandson when he was only a teenager four years ago. A positive thing that she did was to throw all of her efforts into teaching young teens at church Vacation Bible School and Sunday school. She used the loss of her grandson as encouragement to young people to stay focused on God, because, she said, "There's nothing but death out on the streets for our young people . . . God used my grandson's death to help these children." Similarly, after losing her dad twelve years ago, she did her best to pour her heart out to anyone who needed her. As she put it, in this way she tries to live the best life that she can for the Lord. Regarding her grandson, she said, "I asked the Lord to give me peace and forgive me for doubting what happened." She believes and is glad that some of the children benefited from her ministry.

Yet a fourth participant shared losing her mother twelve years ago on mother's day. In the last two to three months of her life, her mother wrote birthday cards for her and her sister and gave the cards early to both of them. In the cards, she wrote words of encouragement. She let them know how much she loved them and how special they were to her and how talented they both were. She had never had this particular expression of love from her mother. As she said, "This blew me away. This is the mother that I wanted, the mother I want now. That's someone I wanted to be closer to. This is someone I wanted to talk to more, but she's gone." This was a relief to the participant. It was also a tangible gift, as she could reread the card several times and release her tears of sadness and joy. It seemed to be a comfort for the lack of a good mother and daughter relationship. However, three weeks later, after she had finally received the mother that

she had always longed for, her mother died. She said, "This loss left her with unresolved issues regarding her mother. She continued to grieve and said she used to "go to work like a zombie." She was finally able to release her grief six months later when she had a conversation with God. She said, I talked to God like I'm talking to you. I finally asked God to take it off of me and to help me let it go. I kept on letting it go. And before I knew it, it was like something was lifted, the elephant wasn't sitting on my chest anymore and I was able to just move on. There's something about the power of prayer, and taking a sincere heart onto the Lord and putting that burden on the throne of grace, understanding that I'm going to be taken care of and that's what happened.

This participant used the strategy of prayer as a positive action that helped her release her grief. She felt unburdened once she did get to the point where she could speak to God in prayer.

A positive action that a participant said she took to take care of herself in response to her grief upon her mom's passing was to be sure and say "I love you" to those she cared for. Even though her mother and father never expressed with words that they loved her, she said, "I knew in my heart she did. And my dad did. By their actions." She said she recently also lost her brother and all of her losses led her to make sure she expresses her love. She said, "I always say I love you to people, and I mean it." She makes sure to never part with anger. She said that when she writes to anyone, she always writes Love at the end. Because, as she put it, "you never know what's going to happen. I think it's a real positive thing that came out of my grief for me."

Similarly, one participant spoke of how she always focuses on the good. In times of loss she took her parents' advice to remember that there is always someone worse off

than herself in any situation. In this way, she said, "I just made myself really come to understand that even in a tragedy there's good in it. It wasn't easy to do but I saw that despite my outward displays, crying, weeping, still going through all of the motions people go through when they grieve, I knew I was going to be okay." She said she believes that everything happens for a reason. She used to be stuck on having to understand the why of grief. But she makes an effort to remind herself that she must focus on the good. She believes that she must move on and be a blessing for someone else.

A second question for discussion was, "Do you feel stuck in your pain? If so, how do you experience feeling stuck?" The writer explained that when someone feels stuck in pain, one couldn't make any headway. The participants expressed various degrees of the process of coping with grief that they were experiencing. Their responses to whether they felt stuck in their grief or not spanned a wide range from feelings of hopelessness and no joy to hope and a sense of wonder and awe about being connected to God. First, the writer shared with the group that she went on a quest for answers to her pain when she lost various family members throughout her life. One way she tried to get herself unstuck was to read and listen to other people's stories about how they dealt with loss. She also directly asked God.

Of the participants who responded to the question about feeling stuck or not, one participant stood out in her complete despair, saying she has been feeling stuck ever since she lost her mom twenty-three years ago. Then she also lost her dad more recently, which compounded her grief and sense of hopelessness. She shared with the group, "Sometimes I feel like I'll never know what it's like to be happy. I love God, I know He has my back,

but I feel like there's something missing. I am going through the motions, just taking care of my kids, but it's just not enough." She felt so hopeless that it feels comforting to believe she will see her parents again one day. She said, "I don't fear dying, and I certainly look forward to the day when I'll see my parents again." She expressed her lack of understanding and her need to ask, "Why is God doing this to our family?"

In contrast, another speaker added that each of her losses, including the material losses awakened earlier losses, but that she does not feel stuck. In a graduate school course that she attended, she liked hearing the professor's take on attachment. The professor said there was an original safe place before we were made, before God looked at us in his hands and He delighted in us. The speaker shared that this image of God reveling in us humans, His creations, was comforting to her. As she put it, "I've been reveling in that this week." The writer responded to this participant's remarks during the discussion and shared how she sees a lot of people angry about their loss. And as a Chaplain, she has learned to be able to share and take whatever she has that God has given her, so that she can help someone else to get to the same understanding and to get beyond the pain. She added that whatever time we have is a time to share, time to care, a time to love, a time to live.

In between the two extremes of one person feeling completely stuck and two others who shared their marveling at God's presence, another participant spoke of how every time she lost a job, home, a failed relationship, they all awakened the concept of loss in her. She had a series of losses starting with the loss of her dad, then her mom, then her husband. As she said, "The pain would return with each loss. They woke up the same pain. Some of the losses we don't have time to heal from." In saying this, she confirmed

the first speaker's feelings of despair. At the same time, this speaker remarked that she gained out of every one of her losses. She said that all of the losses led her to a summit to find herself in God. She said that now she knows that she is accepted for she is.

Similar to the second speaker, this speaker also embraced hope. She said that situations of loss come to help us to know God. As she put it, "In all of the knowing in life, if we don't know God, we are always going to be in a place that we feel helpless." She believes that God is there to answer our questions and God is okay with our questions, because God has the answers. In this way, she found the balance between hopelessness and hope. She also shared that she was able to move through the process of grief partly because three days before her mom passed, "she said she loved me and that did it for me." She was able to get unstuck and move forward by turning to God. She imparted the group her conclusion that "We don't always understand the methods God uses to get us there." She has come to the understanding that "God has His way."

Overall, each person was very supportive and respectful of one another's story. Six out of the eight people in the general afternoon discussion were more vocal, while two expressed their shyness to speak within a large group and spoke less in response to each discussion question (Appendix F). The latter contributed some thoughts toward the end of the discussion when each person was invited to conclude about the effectiveness of the grief support group on them. It appeared that those who participated in the discussion more had more of a need to be heard. They were ready and willing to share their story. They embraced the process of healing and benefited from the affirmation of being heard. Several participants in the discussion group expressed having never been heard. They were pleased with the process of the grief support group and said they had

not realized how much they needed such a support group. In turn, half of the participants showed interest in joining the ongoing grief support group they learned about during this retreat.

Following the afternoon discussion questions, we were led into worship by one of the participants who is a minister and a songstress. She played the piano and sang some hymns for us and encouraged us to join in. The writer introduced the music session by pointing out that worship is one of the healing strategies—it can be a way for dealing with grief—and that the Lord wants to be ministered to, also. After about ten minutes sharing in worship, the writer presented various constructive and destructive strategies of grief. Among the constructive strategies she mentioned prayer, meditation, relaxation techniques, meditating on scripture, music, reading testimonials, support groups, lament, counseling, and humor. Some of the destructive she brought up were use of alcohol, drugs, getting into unhealthy relationships, overeating.

She also spoke about the book of Job and the story of Lazarus and shared with the group her own questions about her most recent grief. Regarding lessons from the book of Job, she remarked on the importance of Job's friends' silence. She said, "Sometimes the best thing we can do for someone is the ministry of silence." In addition, the writer briefly spoke about the historical account of African American grief and the similarity of African American slavery to that of the Israelites. She also remarked that we have lost the art of grieving. She pointed out the importance of mourning, and the role that women professionals can play. In Eastern cultures, there is still a tradition of mourning. There are professional mourners who know how to lament and they know how to bring grief out and how to process it. They are hired to come to funerals to lament. In Western culture

we're finding other ways cope with grief and that the writer's role that day was to be a professional mourner taking others through the grieving process. She said she hoped that the support group experience on that day was taking the participants to the Wailing Wall, which still is done in Israel today.

She pointed out how important it is to join a support group and stay connected to others going through pain. She also recommended reaching out to people who are healthy, and who have experienced the grieving process. She brought up theologian Lewter Cooper who asserts that regardless of our circumstances; we need to be able to embrace ourselves in the midst of trauma. According to Lewter Cooper, renewal of the mind is important. Therefore, bad thoughts must be replaced with good thoughts. New information can drive out the darkness.

In the last part of the day, the participants reviewed the day and what they got out of it. The writer asked them to share what was effective and what was not effective about the support group. One person spoke of realizing that she needs to get counseling. Another participant said the day's sharing made her want to connect more. Similarly, two others said they appreciated having the chance to speak and be heard. They liked being able to go beyond their shyness and speak in a group they could trust. Another participant said the group discussions helped her realize how common we are in our suffering. The last speaker said being in the group reminded her of how grateful she is that her brother, the writer's husband who recently passed away, had love in his life in his final years. None of the participants had experienced a grief support group, and they all agreed that they gleaned a lot from being in the group.

A surprising finding was that one participant said she realized she needed to get counseling. This was surprising because her conclusion earlier in the day had been that she longed to be with her deceased parents. In other words, her conclusion at the end of the day was in stark contrast to her earlier expression of profound hopelessness about her life and resistance to the process of moving through her grief. She said she saw that she closes herself off from people and she recognized this as one of the stages of grief. She expressed her realization of low self-esteem. She also said the group helped her open up and share her grief. In the group, she felt love and acceptance and wanted to seek counseling to move through her grieving process.

Many of the participants talked about the group helping them feel safe and connected. One of them expressed it in the words:

> I met a plethora of wonderful people. So my day was enriched. I feel like this is causing me to desire to connect more. I look at it as networking. To connect outside the circle I have now. God is enlarging my territory anyway. What we went through together is not meant for a pool but a river. It's got to flow out. When we can get to that place where we open ourselves up…

Even as this speaker praised the benefits of connecting with others, she also spoke about the danger of turning human beings into a god. When we do this, God sometimes takes the people and things away from us "that we have perpetuated as Gods without knowing." She said that God prefers us to lean on God and not on other people. In particular, she applauded one of the participants, who appeared to be in a lot of pain, for having made the effort to come to the support group that day. She concluded her remarks by saying, "I just want to thank all of you for receiving me when I came and for allowing me to pour, so we could be a river."

Another speaker found her voice in the group regardless of being shy. She said a lot of people grieve death, but she tries to focus on other people. While talking to God

every day, she asks God questions that still float in her mind, especially regarding her most recent loss, that of her brother. While it is still too soon to expect to get over her loss, she says it will take her a long time to get over her brother's death. She comforts herself with the thought of him being a good father and she is grateful that he finally had a wife in his later years and was not alone. She reminisced on her brother's love for his wife whom he cherished greatly. The knowledge that he was happy and loved at the end of his life helps ease her grief.

Similarly, a second speaker expressed her appreciation for being able to share her story in the group. As she put it, "We would not have known how common we are in our sufferings had we not been able to have a platform to share our stories. We all have some common threads." She reminded the others in the group that while the support group may not solve all our problems, it is something that will produce some relief. She also said that having told our stories allowed us to lament without feeling ashamed. Having done that gave us hope for the future, as we all moved a little bit further in the grieving process.

A third speaker said shyness and fear had kept her in the background where she became comfortable to be silent. What she got out of the group was that she was able to tell her story today and that took her out of her shell. She was able to defy her fear and speak in the safety of the group and express her experience of the deaths of her mother, her close friend, and her brother. She was able to look back and see her own boldness of questioning her friend as her friend was dying. As she said, "it gave me a time to ask someone questions while they are right there at the end of their life." Thus she was able to gain insight into her dying friend's conversation with God. She added that during the

time that her brother was terminal and she was feeling hopeless, she heard a song on the radio about when hope is gone, that seemed to speak to her. She said, "It stopped me in my tracks." Her brother spent his last forty days with his family, blessing each of them. Out of her losses, this speaker concluded that regardless of her fear, she felt like God was there with her and she held on to God. As she put it, "I stayed here with him."

Yet another participant who spoke about her experience that day said she found solace in the group. One of the major things she received was coming together with others as a group and being able to express her grief. She was thankful for the opportunity of being able to participate in the group. She realized that she was holding a lot of grief and was not able to release it. She said,

> When you don't talk, you keep it in, you hide, until you run into someone who invites you to a group like this, and you can't hide. I thank all of you today for the experience. I am happy to be here. . . its wonderful knowing that you can get together with people as a group and talk things out.

She went on to say that while she is dealing with a lot of issues within her home, mainly her mother with dementia, her son who is diabetic, and her ailing husband, she believes that the Lord is giving her the tenacity to deal with the present issues along with her unresolved grief for her grandson who was murdered. Given the burden she is carrying, and the positive experience she had in this support group, she concluded that she will pursue a support group.

Finally, the last participant who shared what she got out of the day said this day was beautiful. She believed that God was definitely right there, in the midst of everything that was going on. She therefore exhorted the writer to write and speak of the divine healing experience that everyone shared on that day. As she put it, "the day was full of hope." To this, the peer associate added that this

retreat was an excellent initiatory event toward recovery for those who had not had the opportunity to deal with their loss(es). She said she appreciated how each person was allowed to feel and talk about her pain and how everyone showed respect for each other's experiences. She said, "the shared experiences helped all of us to move past any stumbling blocks in the road. . . . It was okay to feel. It was ok if anyone was stuck . . . . All bases were covered. This was very well done." Overall, the commonality of issues surrounding grief seemed to allow everyone to look and discover any shared meaning for suffering.

Results of the Follow-up Reflexive Journals

The writer requested the participants to write down their thoughts about the retreat in their reflexive journals, which she collected through email at the end of two weeks. The overall group experience seemed to be that they realized, as one participant put it, "we do not stand alone in grief. Everyone that was there benefited from each other." All of the participants mentioned how friendly, relaxed, and pleasant the retreat was. One participant pointed out, "needless to say, it was very emotional for all of us." Therefore, everyone remarked in their follow-up reflexive journal about the safe environment that the grief retreat support group provided.

In her follow-up reflexive journal, the first participant expressed her appreciation for being invited to attend the grief retreat. She said that as a child she had feelings of shame and unworthiness, which "caused in [her] a sense of sadness and isolation, and hampered [her] sharing of feelings and experience true intimacy with friends during [her] early adult years." She wrote, "as a sixty-five-year-old woman, I didn't realize how much this grief retreat would impact my sense of well-being. This retreat provided me an

opportunity to express some deep, unresolved grief of over thirty years that related to shame and unworthiness." The second participant also expressed appreciation because she had not had much chance to talk about her loss of her grandson. She said, "Up to this point, I had only talked about [my pain] with a therapist and [had] some limited conversation [about my grandson's murder] with my daughter because I didn't want to upset her."

The participants wrote how they had an opportunity to release some unresolved emotions. They wrote that they experienced the benefit and comfort of hearing each other's stories. They expressed comfort in knowing that some of their questions were questions that others had as well. They wrote that the support group allowed them to openly discuss their emotions with each other, knowing the others had also experienced loss and were also trying to cope. There appeared to be a common bond between the participants, as each of them expressed relief that she was not alone in finding herself angry with God. The fourth participant said, "It's ok to be angry, but also you must be able to trust in God and know that he will heal the pains of your heart, he will bring you through the grief." Surprisingly, the fourth participant shared that the group helped her arrive at a stage of acceptance of her father's passing. As she wrote,

> I believe in my heart, that my father was ready and God ultimately knew best. And while I will miss him always and forever, what I got out of this retreat is that I believe talking to someone and even groups of people can be very therapeutic and comforting. . . . While perhaps the retreat didn't heal my broken heart, it did provide a release and an opportunity to release some emotions that were pinned up inside of my heart.

In her follow-up reflexive journal, the third participant wrote about bonding with the other participants who were grieving: "I could listen and feel the hurt of others." The fourth participant wrote about not knowing what to expect from a retreat with others. She

had trepidations about being required to speak openly regarding her emotions and to allow herself to become vulnerable. However, she wrote that she realized "each person had a story that everyone could relate to, and it seemed as though everyone shared the same pains and frustrations." As this participant wrote, "whether it was a recent loss or a loss in the past, we all share in something that a lot of people [who have not experienced a loss] will never come to understand. . . . [She therefore] felt a sense of an unspoken bond, because everyone bared their soul and was honest about what they were feeling inside."

In her follow-up reflexive journal the fourth participant admitted that she was guarded when she arrived at the retreat. She said she went in thinking she would answer some basic questions, without allowing herself to become unguarded and let her wall down. She did not want to allow others into her emotions, because she felt as though no one could understand her feelings and her hang ups. As she put it,

> How could they understand, I lost a mother at young age, and then subsequently lost my father and my best friend in the world. People say they understand, but how could they, I felt my parents were cheated in many different respects. I knew the retreat was Christian based so there was some comfort in knowing that everyone there was a Christian, but I also was in fear that others would insist upon forcing the phrase, "God doesn't make any mistakes" or "It's not for us to understand".

This participant wrote that she did not want to hear clichés and any well-meaning words of comfort because she believed "God had made a mistake: [my dad] wasn't supposed to leave us so soon, we had just got started." However, she wrote that by the completion of the retreat, she was pleasantly surprised by her own openness.

In the group, the participants could share about loss, and share the journeys of healing they each were experiencing. They expressed that the retreat provided them a safe environment, where they could talk freely about their feelings. As the fifth participant wrote, "being able to be open with one another in a safe environment was very powerful to me and I witnessed the impact this environment had on others in the group." The sixth participant added that the support group retreat helped her put each loss into perspective as she was able to listen to the lecture and to the other participants' stories within the support group as well as tell her own story.

The lamentation gave her a sense of closure she needed. She wrote in her reflexive journal, "I was able to lament with the group and glean from the small group that was so supportive of me as I was able to express my grief. The discussion stirred past grief which allowed the grieving process to bring about healing, perspective, and closure to my own journey of grief and loss."

Each participant seemed to agree that the atmosphere at the retreat was supportive and enabled him or her to reach toward self-recovery. They communicated how much listening to others helped them open up and share their stories. The sixth participant wrote in her reflexive journal how much it helped her to be able to talk to others in the group who were also grieving. She wrote, "being able to talk with others about the loss was very healthy for me. [It] strengthened me to be able to let go of my guilt. After all these years, I am able to move forward and put a tombstone on my baby's grave. I feel guilty that I had not done this before now. But I have the fortitude to complete this process."

In general, the participants expressed a feeling of empowerment in their follow-up reflexive journals. The third participant wrote that in the small group, she received words of encouragement from one of the associates who facilitated the discussion. His words gave her strength. She wrote that it helped her to hear him affirm that our loved ones did not leave us, but were called away by God and they will continue to live inside of us. The associate helped her see that "we can choose to release [our loved ones] so that we can live in their legacy." She also wrote that the associate helped her "understand the pain and know that there will come a time when it will get a little easier."

The fifth participant, who was in the same small group discussion, wrote that the associate said the dying person makes an agreement with God to leave this earth "just like Jesus on the cross gave up the ghost and died." This participant further wrote that in her opinion, "grief is valuable when we have resolution. We have to go through it and it is bigger than we can see." She gave Psalm 23, Psalm of David, as an example of how she feels comforted when she has made a resolution to accept her loss. She then quoted Psalm 23:

> The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
> He makes me lie down in green pastures,
> he leads me beside quiet waters,
> he refreshes my soul.
> He guides me along the right paths
> for his name's sake.
> Even though I walk
> through the darkest valley,[a]
> I will fear no evil,
> for you are with me;
> your rod and your staff,
> they comfort me.

> You prepare a table before me
> in the presence of my enemies.
> You anoint my head with oil;
> my cup overflows.
> Surely your goodness and love will follow me
> all the days of my life,
> and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
> forever.

The fifth participant concluded that upon reflecting on her experience of the retreat, she "learned that we must have goals to achieve. Goals that build us up, goals that help us stay focused."

For different reasons, each of the participants had been feeling a sense of guilt and shame, and had not had an outlet to express these feelings. They found the group helpful in being able to talk about their loss and pain. The first participant expressed her relief of a long-term process of grieving. She wrote she had been holding onto her grief for thirty years until the afternoon discussion at the retreat. She had never talked openly in a group about the abortion she had so many years ago. As she put it,

> I never was able to allow myself the ability to feel it to the depth that I did during the time of this retreat. While I talked about how I went to a Catholic Priest to get forgiveness, I realized I needed to unload that grief in a safe group. I was so delivered from a great guilt burden as a result of the retreat.

This participant wrote in her reflexive journal that the support group gave voice to her pain and grief, which was important to her. It allowed her to put her suffering "together with Christ's own suffering, shame, death, and resurrection." As she put it, she "had a form of resurrection or release from the shame and guilt [she] was carrying."

> It gave me a big deliverance of a gigantic burden I had been carrying. I can share better about my grief, as well as opening myself up to others about who I really am as a human being. I know and feel more of God's tender loving care about grief sharing through participating in this retreat.

This participant concluded how she looks forward to repeating this experience and the possibilities that await her as she participates in more grief retreats within a Christian atmosphere such as this retreat.

The sixth participant wrote in her reflexive journal about an unresolved grief from twenty-five years ago that she carried into this retreat. At the age of thirteen, a neighborhood man murdered her thirty-year-old sister. She wrote, "For a long time I felt guilt for not knowing the details my family withheld from me which I later reasoned was due to my age." This participant wrote that later, she was able to assert her power at the last parole board of her sister's murderer. This experience helped her come to some closure.

The sixth participant also wrote in her reflexive journal about her premature newborn who died two days after he was born. She wrote about feeling guilty for making the decision to remove life support from him. She wondered if she could have done something to save her baby's life. She had mixed emotions when leaving the hospital without her baby. Just days later, she had to prepare for the baby's funeral. She wrote that it was excruciating to give birth and then bury her baby within the same week. She did not know what to do with her emotions. The decision she and her husband made to remove life support seemed to plague her immensely in the months to follow. She then felt even guiltier for becoming pregnant again four months later and for being happy about it.

The sixth participant wrote in her reflexive journal she had been feeling isolated from others because of her pain and counseling and support groups in the past were helpful. She has come to an understanding of grief through time. She came to realize

how, after attending the retreat, she was able to put her grief into perspective. She reflected on how she was able to see the benefits of allowing herself to move through the grieving process. As she allowed herself to look into her pain, she saw a positive experience in the midst of her pain. She wrote,

> The hospital had a support group for parents who lost a child. In the support group I was able to hear other mothers who had not had a chance to hold their baby. I had a chance to bathe my baby, dress him, feed him, hold him cuddle, take pictures and name him. So in this I felt so blessed because that did not have to happen. I saw the good and blessing I had with my baby that other mothers did not have.

All of the participants credited the retreat with their being able to move through the grieving process. They could embrace every strategy of grieving—from storytelling and discussion, to lectures and even massage—that the support group offered them.

The participants also expressed the benefits of the massage therapist who came to the retreat and offered head and neck massages. They all agreed that the massages were outstanding, because, as the third participant noted, they "not only received massages but the therapist was also speaking softly about God." The first participant remarked that she "didn't realize how much tension [she] was carrying in [her] muscles and joints." The second participant wrote about how the massage therapist "prayed as she massaged away the knots in [her] neck and upper back." The third participant wrote how it helped that the massage took place before the afternoon discussion, helping her release her stress and feel more relaxed and open.

The participants were all female African American congregants between the ages of mid-thirties to mid-sixties. Three of the participants were married, one was divorced and one was single. Each participant was dealing with losses whether in relationships or the death of a loved one or even both. Each participant seem to realize the need for

effective coping strategies as well as the power of a support group that provided a safe place to lament and tell their story.

Results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test (Appendix H)

The pre and post-tests measured two general categories: coping strategies and the levels of knowledge of the participants involved in this particular grief support retreat group. In both pre and post-tests, there were ten Yes/No questions on knowledge and twenty-nine Yes/No questions on coping strategies (See the Data Analysis section of the Methods chapter and Tables 1 and 2 for additional information about the measures.)

As shown in Table 1, all five participants demonstrated an increase in knowledge about grief and in the use of appropriate grief coping strategies following participation in the grief support retreat group. At the pre-test, knowledge scores ranged from 30% to 80%, with a mean of 41.5%. At the post-test, knowledge scores ranged from 80% to 100%, with a mean of 90%. The change in knowledge scores ranged from 20% to 70%, with a mean of 45%. At pre-test, copying strategy scores ranged from 48.27% to 72.41%, with a mean of 60.34%. At post-test, coping strategy scores ranged from 68.96% to 93.10%, with a mean of 81.03%. The change in coping strategy scores ranged from 10.34% to 41.38%, with a mean increase of 25.86%.

The Wilcoxin signed rank test revealed a z statistic of 2.06, $p < 0.05$ for knowledge and a z statistic of 2.04, $p < 0.05$ for coping strategies.[1] Thus, the writer was able to conclude that there is less than a 5% that the null hypothesis is correct and that the differences that were observed were due to chance alone. Instead, the writer was able to conclude that there was a significant change in scores and that participants in the grief

[1] Sidney Siegel & N. John Castellan.

support group demonstrate improved knowledge and skills. Improvement was observed among all participants.

Table 1: Percentages of pre- and post-tests for knowledge

Participants	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference	Sign	Rank	Signed Rank (SR)	SR^2
P-1	80%	100%	20%	+	4	4	16
P-2	60%	80%	20%	+	4	4	16
P-3	30%	90%	70%	+	1	1	1
P-4	60%	80%	20%	+	4	4	16
P-5	40%	90%	50%	+	2	2	4

Wilcoxin Signed Rank Test Calculation:

$Z = \sum SR/\sqrt{\sum SR^2} = 15/7.28 = 2.06, p < 0.05$

Table 2: Percentages of pre- and post-tests for coping strategies

Participants	Pre-Test	Post Test	Difference	Sign	Rank	Signed Rank (SR)	SR^2
P-1	62.06%	93.10%	31.04%	+	2.5	2.5	6.25
P-2	72.41%	82.75%	10.34%	+	4.5	4.5	20.25
P-3	55.17%	86.20%	31.03%	+	2.5	2.5	6.25
P-4	58.62%	68.96%	10.34%	+	4.5	4.5	20.25
P-5	48.27%	89.65%	41.38%	+	1	1	1

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to identify grief strategies and explore the benefit of direct pastoral involvement in a small grief-care retreat and support group for African American congregants who have experienced a loss so they may make progress through the grieving process and heal. The group training was designed to equip and empower the participants with coping strategies. The proposed treatment hypothesis for this study was that pastoral care through a strategy-focused support group can help grieving African American congregants develop effective strategies and behaviors for healing from loss and grief. The writer also hypothesized that direct involvement by a professionally trained grief pastoral care counselor can help participants move through the grieving and healing process. Indeed, the findings confirmed the writer's hypotheses.

Unexpected even to the writer herself, the writer did not merely conduct a support group or plan to do ministry for hurting participants. Unbeknownst to her, she would become the heartbeat of her study when she set out to implement it, as she herself became a participant as well, since she became a grieving widow while developing this study. Shortly after the onset of her project journey, she lost her oldest brother, and nearing the end of the study, she lost her precious husband. The healing was therefore as much needed for the writer, as it was for the participants of the grief retreat and support group.

The writer not only began preparing to develop a healthy grief care model for others, but found herself having to refine and use the strategies she was researching, for her own progress through the grieving process. Her research thus became a healing strategy, and the writer became what Henry Nouwen called the wounded healer, as s/he was able to bind her own wounds while healing the wounds of others. As Nouwen writes, "The minister, the story tells us, is sitting among the poor, binding his/her wounds one at a time, waiting for the moment when he/she will be needed. The minister is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his/her wounds and at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others."[1] The writer thus became her own project; she not only developed the project, but was able to continually move through the grieving process as she brought others a little further along the journey of grief and healing.

In addition to the wounded healer skills that a minister of healing must have, as recommended by Nouwen, the writer embraced the effective listening attributes author Emma Justes recommends in her book, *Hearing Beyond the Words,*[2] when helping others in pain. The writer adhered to the wisdom of Justes, that it is vital to develop effective listening skills as one in ministry. Justes states that "Talking or not talking about a person one grieves does not determine whether one feels the pain of the loss or not."[3] She notes that when someone laments or tells their story, it is important to be a deep listener to the speaker. If the listener lacks developed listening skills, it will impair the interaction and the speaker will be null of being heard. For it is in the effective listening that a healer

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[1]Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1979).

[2]Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 33-35.

[3]Ibid., 33.

allows the wounded to be heard and begin to heal. Therefore as a pastoral care counselor implementing the project, the writer made listening to others lament while they told their stories a priority.

In her writing Justes further states, "[c]onversation, an invitation to talk about loss, and an openness to allow the pain and tears to come into one's presence as a listener, provides another step toward healing through the grief process."[4] Thus, the healer can hear beyond the words of the speaker. As one participant in the support group stated,

> There was a catharsis of tears as we all began to formulate ways to reconstruct our wounds through laughter, storytelling, massage, self-care, and sharing. We understood the Five Stages of Grief and the historical components of cultural grief. We began with prayer. Finally we all prayed for one another. Love ruled the day and healing had no option but to take place.

This participant's summation and her opinion of the grief retreat and support group went beyond the writer's expectations of the effect the retreat would have. The writer knew the value of coping strategies presented in the model she developed, but was elated to hear the participants mention that they received immediate benefit from the grief retreat and support group. It was clear to the writer that the participants came to the group with some skills, knowledge, strategies, and resolved or unresolved grief, and each participant learned new coping strategies and acquired new knowledge on coping with grief, as well as enhanced some of the coping strategies and knowledge she already had, so that she could move more effectively through the grieving process.

Based on the quantitative results of the pre and post-tests, and the qualitative results of the grief retreat and support group, this study confirms the benefit and

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[4]Ibid., 33.

implementation of a grief support group to assist African American congregants move through the grieving process. Given the encouraging and affirmative responses from the participants of this study and the request of other congregants who desire to participate in future grief support groups, the writer's mission in the future is to establish grief support groups in African American congregations. The writer will endeavor to train other ministers and lay members alike to implement grief support groups, allowing each participant to move through the grieving process while embracing healing through the use of effective grief strategies and relying on a relationship with God and with one another. As the writer's passion was to develop and implement a grief-care model of coping strategies and provide grievers with concrete tools for transforming hurt, pain, and grief, the writer hopes such a model will become a tool of grief transformation among African American congregants.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was originally intended for twelve participants, and it was meant to include six male and six female African American congregants. However, the study was limited by the number (n = 0) of male congregants who actually attended the grief retreat, as there were many last-minute cancellations and no-shows (one female and six males). Therefore, the study lacked a representation of African American males, and all of the participants were African American females. Since it is not possible to generalize about the effectiveness of the grief support model from the experiences of only five females, the writer recommends that future studies include a wider sample of congregants and to include a sample that represents both genders.

At the conclusion of this study, the writer recommends that African American Congregations establish ministry support groups to assist congregants through the grieving process. Ministry to those who are experiencing grief and loss can include training seminars and grief retreats. Furthermore, African American congregations would benefit from financial and professional investment in such ministry. Assuming that African American congregations have limited resources, they may collaborate to pool their resources and expertise within their congregation and community. Leaders with limited resources can also train lay members to facilitate small support groups.

The current study was limited by the fact that the writer worked solo while making the grief support group arrangements. The planning and organizing of the support group might have benefited from collaboration with other pastors and counselors who could have contributed their expertise. Therefore, the writer recommends the leadership of the African American Congregation and its community to collaborate with other professionals in planning and implementing grief support groups. She also recommends collaborating with chaplains of local hospice or hospital facilities so that they may collectively serve as an outreach ministry to their own African American community and allow for expertise in grief-care. Finally, the writer recommends ongoing education to continually improve such ministry that allows ministers and church leadership to be trained formally by professionals of pastoral grief care.

APPENDIX A

SCHEDULE

Appendix A: Schedule
Schedule for Grief Support Group Retreat

Saturday, October 13, 2012

The Martin De Porres Center

2330 Airport Drive, Columbus, OH 43219

9:00	Registration/Continental Breakfast
9:30	Grief Support/ Stages of Grief /Synopsis Grief Strategies
	Didactic on the power of telling our story
10:15	Share and Lament in Small Groups
	Tell our stories that we each wrote in our journals
11:45	Humor Video
12:00	Lunch
	Two grief support group leaders share about future grief support group meetings and invite participants to join
12:30	Hand out Discussion Questions
	Take 5 minutes to write out your answers
	Group Discussion (30 mins.)
1:00	Power Point Presentation on Grief Strategies
12:30	Worship Service/Songs of Comfort
12:45	Power Point Presentation
1:00	Hand out Discussion Questions
	Take 5 minutes to write out your answers
	Group Discussion (30 mins.)
	Discuss the answers you wrote out
1:30	Coffee Break and Snacks/Video
1:45	Review the day (15 mins.)
	Power Point Presentation: "Where do we go from Here?"
2:00	Prayer for Each Other in Pairs
2:30	Benediction

APPENDIX B

DIRECTIONS

What:	Grief Support Group Retreat
Time:	9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Date:	Saturday, October 13, 2012
Where:	The Martin De Porres Center (The Ohio Dominican Campus, @ the end of Nelson Road and through gate and @ top of the hill) 2330 Airport Drive, Columbus, 43219
Meals:	Breakfast and Lunch will be served
Dress:	Casual
Purpose:	Project for Dissertation, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX C

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Appendix C: Journal Questions

Please keep a journal for a week. Each day, choose one question from the questions below to write about each day.

1. What is the source of your pain that brought you to this support group? Whom or what did you lose to cause your current grief? How long ago was your loss? What was your first reaction after the news of your loss? What did you do? Are you having trouble accepting your loss?

2. What was your most painful loss? Have you experienced deep grieving? How? Please describe what grief felt like for you. Discuss the feeling(s) you experienced the most strongly.

3. Are you currently experiencing unresolved grief? If so, how long have you been grieving?

4. What strategy(ies) do you use to deal with your grief? Alcohol, prescription medicine, counseling, talking to someone about your feelings, overeating, undereating, exercise, over-working, slacking at work, prayer, meditation, weeping, solitude, reading, painting, drawing, music, escape, diversion, avoidance, denial, anger, talk to your minister/spiritual advisor. (Discuss those that apply to your situation.)

5. How much are you having images or thoughts of your loved one when s/he died or other thoughts about the death that really bother you? Please try writing a letter to the person you lost.

6. Name some of the best words someone gave you when you were in the grief process. Name some of the worst things someone said to you. Name one of the best actions someone took on your behalf. Name one of the worst actions someone did toward you. If you could write down a few words of comfort or do something to help someone who is grieving, what would you say or do? Think of any poem or song or write your own personal inspiration.

7. What have you understood about grief?

APPENDIX D

COVENANT AGREEMENT

Appendix D: Covenant Agreement

Covenant Purpose

The purpose of having a group covenant is to try to provide a safe environment where participants can experience authentic community and spiritual growth (Ephesians 4:2-3, 29, 32).

Group Values

□ *Relationships* – While prayer and discussion of personal grief concerns of a small group, the driving force behind the group is the building of relationships (John 17:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

□ *Authenticity* – The atmosphere of a small group should encourage openness and transparency among members. This is an environment where people should feel free to be themselves (James 1:26).

□ *Confidentiality* – For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues discussed within a small group will not be shared outside the group (Proverbs 11:13).

□ *Respect* – Group members should never say anything that will embarrass another member or members of the group (Romans 12:10).

□ *Availability* – A primary responsibility of community is to prioritize for specific relationships. This requires a willingness to be available to meet each other's needs (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Group Facilitator Eunice Inez Hale

_____

Participant(s)

Print Name _____

Signature_____

APPENDIX E

VIDEO RELEASE AGREEMENT

Appendix E: Video Release Agreement

Photograph & Video Release Form

I hereby grant permission to the rights of my image, likeness and sound of my voice as recorded on audio or video tape without payment or any other consideration. I understand that my image may be edited and copied Photographic, audio or video recordings may be used for the following purposes: The Doctorate of Ministry dissertation of Eunice Inez Hale.

By signing this release I understand this permission signifies that photographic or video recordings of me will be used by Eunice Inez Hale for her use only for the purpose mention above.

I will be consulted about the use of the photographs or video recording for any purpose other than those listed above.

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to be bound thereby. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material for educational purposes.

Full Name_____

Street Address _____

City _____

Zip Code_____

Signature_____Date_____

APPENDIX F

WHOLE-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Appendix F: Whole-Group Discussion Questions

1. Name one positive action you took, to take care of yourself in your time of grief or loss.

2. Do you feel stuck in your pain? If so, how do you experience feeling stuck?

3. Has this loss has complicated your life? Does your grief interfere with your life?

4. Are there earlier losses in your life that this loss awakened in you? Is your current loss different than the last time(s)? Can you explain the differences in how you felt in each loss?
5. Are there things you used to enjoy doing when your loved one was alive that you avoid doing?

6. What do you need most from others?

7. Did your loss change how you view God? How? At this point in your loss, do you identify in some way(s) with Job?

8. Do you see God playing a role in your loss? Have you ever heard of Black liberation (from James Cone's book, *Black Liberation Theology: The God of the Oppressed*)?

9. Psychologist Nicholas Cooper-Lewter and Theologian James Cone talk about personal versus collective grief among African Americans. Do you see any connection between your present grief and the collective African American history (slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Civil Rights Act)?

10. From mourning to morning. Where do we go from here?

APPENDIX G

FOLLOW-UP REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

Appendix G: Follow-up Reflexive Journal

1. Write whatever you can remember about the morning discussion (in large group) and the small group, any useful discussion from your small group leader.

2. Your experience in the massage therapy.

3. Summary of your prayer partner experience.

4. Overall good/bad experiences and/or new insights.

APPENDIX H

PRE TEST/POST TEST

Appendix H: Pre-Test / Post-Test

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Are you: Single Married Divorced Remarried
2. Are you: 0-19 20-30 31-40 41-60 61-70 71-80 81-90 91-100
3. Are you: Female Male

PRE-TEST/POST-TEST

Please circle one answer (Yes or No) for each question.

Questions on Coping Strategies

1.	Have you ever joined a formal grief support group like this one?	Yes	No
2.	Do you feel you benefited from a grief support group?	Yes	No
3.	Have you ever received grief-care from a professional?	Yes	No
4.	Have you benefited from grief-care counseling from a professional?	Yes	No
5.	Do you believe your pain will lessen with time?	Yes	No
6.	Are you familiar with coping strategies for grief?	Yes	No
7.	Are you aware of grief diversion?	Yes	No
8.	Do you believe there is a benefit to grief diversion?	Yes	No
9.	Do you believe there is a benefit in escaping your grief?	Yes	No
10.	Do you benefit from worship to ease your pain?	Yes	No
11.	Do you benefit from (listening or singing) songs of comfort to ease your pain?	Yes	No
12.	Have you lamented (told your story to someone)?	Yes	No
13.	Do you feel that a group discussion can ease your pain?	Yes	No
14.	Have you ever had focused discussions on grief and pain?	Yes	No
15.	Have you benefited from focused discussions on grief and pain?	Yes	No
16.	Have you journaled (written down your story)?	Yes	No
17.	Have you benefited from journaling (writing down your story)?	Yes	No

18. Do you believe writing can help you through the grieving process? Yes No
19. Have you ever thought of writing as a spiritual tool? Yes No
20. Do you see a connection between humor and pain? Yes No
21. Do you see a benefit of being African American with a collective history of suffering and surviving pain? Yes No
22. Have you created a memorial in honor of your loved one? Yes No
23. Do you think it would help you to create a memorial? Yes No
24. Have you considered fulfilling a dream of your loved one? Yes No
25. Would you consider an annual celebration of your loved one's life? Yes No
26. Would you consider a newspaper announcement in honor of your loved one? Yes No
27. Have you ever had a prayer partner for your grief? Yes No
28. Have you benefited from praying with a prayer partner? Yes No
29. Have you spoken directly to God about your loss? Yes No

Questions on Knowledge

1. Do you know what a grief support group is and what it does? Yes No
2. Is it helpful to you to know the stages of grief? Yes No
3. Can you name some coping strategies for grief? Yes No
4. Are you familiar with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief? Yes No
5. Can you identify the stages of grief? Yes No
6. Have you benefited from turning to humor during your pain? Yes No
7. Psychologist Nicholas Cooper-Lewter and Theologian James Cone talk about personal versus collective grief among African Americans. Do you see any connection between your present grief and the collective African American history (Slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Civil Rights Act)? Yes No
8. Would you consider setting up a fund in your loved one's memory? Yes No
9. Did you receive any answers from God about your loss? Yes No
10. Are you currently experiencing unresolved grief? (Are you experiencing difficulty getting over your loss?) Yes No

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